

M I R I A M.

A NOVEL.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

BY THE AUTHOR OF
FREDERIC & CAROLINE, REBECCA, JUDITH, &c.

—●●●●|✱|●●●—
“ What then remains, but, after past annoy,
“ To take the good vicissitude of joy ?” -

DRYDEN.

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VOL. I.

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M I R I A M.



CHAP. I.

“ On a rock, whose haughty brow

“ Frowns o’er old Conway’s foaming flood,

“ Rob’d in the sable garb of woe,

“ With haggard eyes he stood !”

GRAY.

“ OH for mercy’s sake turn back ! You know not on what a precipice you stand—a terrible gulph yawns beneath it, and you will be swallowed up for ever ! Think of your merciful Creator ;—for what did he send you into this world ? Oh blessed, thrice blessed

VOL. I.

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are those whom he chasteneth ! Turn back, I conjure you turn back, and you will live to thank me ; turn back, or I shall die before you !”

On a beetling cliff, whose terrific front overhung the wide ocean, where roaring surges and hollow sound proclaimed the approaching storm, there, on a fractured nook of rock, within an inch of the space which would plunge him in the deep, never more to lift up his head, stood a youth, whose frantic look and wild gesture conveyed the idea of a maniac !—His hat lay on the turf beside him ; his long dark hair, dishevelled and disordered, floated in the wind ; he lifted up his eyes to Heaven, he smote his hands together, he pressed them to his temples, he crossed them on his breast, and he was on the verge of destruction, when Miriam St. Ledger, her whole countenance

countenance animated, her whole manner energetic and impressive, sprang forwards, and, pulling him with all her strength by his coat, uttered the affecting adjuration which opens this book, in a voice so moving, so touchingly persuasive, that it had power to disarm the person, to whom it was addressed, of his dark intention. He turned round; and when he beheld the face, the form of the lovely object who addressed him, he uttered a deep sigh, and throwing himself on the turf, with his face towards the ground, he continued in silence.

Entirely exhausted with her exertion, and overcome by the affright and horror she had felt, Miriam sat down beside him, and burst into tears. Her convulsive sobs, the effect of a thousand feelings which at the same time affected her, were not wholly disregarded. After a few moments the

stranger turned his head; but, catching the touching look of pity with which he was beheld by her, he covered his face with his hands, and, heaving a deep groan, relapsed into his former posture. At that moment a vivid flash of lightning illumined the ocean; it was followed by a peal of thunder, so loud, so hollow, and so awful, that Miriam involuntarily shuddered! She sprang up from the turf, and moved off a few paces, when turning back, and pausing for a moment, as if to call up her courage, she again addressed her companion—

“Hear you not that voice? It is the voice of the Almighty;—he speaketh terribly; he speaketh to weak, presumptuous mortals, who bid defiance to his laws, who dare to repine at his dispensations. Oh gracious God!” cried she, falling on her knees, and lifting up her hands and eyes, “I thank thee for making
me

me the humble instrument of saving a fellow-creature's life : Oh may he live to bless thy mercy !”

“ Yes,” cried the gentleman, seizing one of her hands, and kneeling beside her, “ yes, I will live to honour, to adore my Maker, and to bless the ministering angel whom he sent to my preservation. Oh for two whole days and one long night have I traversed these cliffs ! Not a being did I see, not a hope had I left ! I was arrived at the pinnacle of destruction when you saved me ! Oh blessed minute !—Blessed do I say ? Alas ! can that be a blessing which bids me still drag on a hopeless being ? Can that be a blessed chance which condemns me to years of suffering ?”

“ Yes,” said Miriam, emphatically pressing his arm, “ happiness, years of happiness

are in store for you—I prophesy that there are.”

“ Ah! I dare not trust you. Did you know what horrors crowd upon me, what —” Another peal of thunder rolled over their heads. He felt his arm instinctively caught. He turned, and beheld Miriam trembling with fear. The rain in large drops fell on their heads. A blast of keen wind blew over the cliff, which was succeeded by the pelting storm.

“ For God’s sake-cover your head !” said Miriam.

The gentleman obeyed her, and, as if in a moment recollecting himself, said, “ Pray let me take you home ; where do you dwell ?”

“ About a mile off, at the castle,” was the answer. “ But where do you go—where is your home ?”

“ My

“ My—— Oh God! where indeed!—I would have found a resting-place just now, but a guardian spirit withheld me.”

“ Go with me,” said Miriam. “ I must not stay here; yet I cannot leave you behind me. I am drenched with rain. I tremble with fatigue. I shall want your assistance to gain the castle.”

“ The castle! who do you take me to there?”

“ No one; I am its only inhabitant at present, save two domestics.”

“ Is it possible that in this remote, this secluded spot, your youth, your beauty, your benevolence,” said the stranger with emphasis, “ are left to bloom unknown and unregarded!”

“It is possible,” said Miriam. “I do not disclaim your praise ; it is possible to remain here alone unknown and unregarded, a desolate and isolated being.”—She sighed, paused, and resumed.—“Yes, all this is possible, and it is possible also not to feel it ; for were I placed in the midst of the crowded world, yet know I not a single being who professes for me the smallest atom of regard. The whole world to me is but a cheerless void ; of it I know so little, that I am content for ever to remain here in compliance with the commands of him, who alone seems to be connected with me, rather than be an uninterested spectator of those ties, those connexions, those relatives in others, which I am bereft of myself. But pray quicken your pace,” continued she ; “I cannot converse while I am in this place.”

The

The gentleman did as he was desired ; but when he arrived at the large gate of the spacious porch which guarded the castle, he let go the arm of his companion with quickness, and was turning back, when perceiving his intention, Miriam again stopped him, again entreated him to enter.

“ Oh heavenly creature !” cried he, “ you know not to what invidious surmises you may expose yourself by introducing a perfect stranger into this mansion at so late an hour !”

“ I despise them all. Come in ; let the castle be your asylum for this night. May you rest, may you forget the tumultuous passions which have assailed you, and sweet will be my reward.”

The stranger no longer hesitated ; he pulled the great bell, which reverberated with hollow peal through the spacious edi-

fice. An old man presently appeared ; he held a little lamp in his hand, and as he unlocked the door, he cried, " Lord a mercy, Miss Merry ! where have you been ? Why, child, you must be wet to the skin ! "

" I am indeed," answered Miriam ; " but, good Joseph, I have brought with me a stranger," said she, as she passed through the porch, followed by her companion, " who, like me, was overtaken by the storm ; but, unlike me, knew not where to find a habitation for the night."

" Come in, and welcome," said Joseph, as he lifted up his lantern to the face of the gentleman.

The heavy bolts were again drawn, and the inhabitants of the castle endeavoured to shut out the storm.

CHAP. II.

“ But nothing could a charm impart,

“ To sooth the stranger’s woe ;

“ For grief lay heavy at his heart,

“ And tears began to flow.”

GOLDSMITH.

THE wood fire blazed in the chimney ; it sent out its warmth over the large waincotted apartment which contained Miriam and her guest. She tried to exhilarate his spirits, but she tried in vain ; till finding it grow late before she would suffer Joseph to conduct him to his chamber, Miriam thus

addressed the stranger.—“I beseech you, Sir, by all your hopes of happiness, grant the request which I am going to make to you ere you retire; promise me sacredly, fervently, promise me never again to attempt your life; I conjure you deny me not!”

“Ah, my preserver!” cried the stranger, “while I bow my knee, hear me swear that I will no more tempt the wrath of my Creator by daring to fly from his just inflictions; that, let what will happen, as I journey through this vale of tears, I will submit with patience, and never forget thee, thou good, thou perfect creature! And now I do beseech thee chiefly, as Ferdinand says, ‘that I may note it in my prayers,’ what is your name?”

“Miriam St. Ledger.”

“Miriam, the fairest work of Heaven, adieu!” said he, as he followed Joseph to
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the chamber which had been prepared for his reception. Confused and hurried by the events of the evening, Miriam sought her pillow in vain; her imagination was wholly engrossed by that manly form, those graceful features, which thus in early youth were become the prey of sorrow; for from his looks she judged that the stranger could not be more than twenty years of age. Towards morning she fell into a slumber, but she started, and quickly awoke; for she dreamt that she had arrived on the cliff only time enough to behold a mountain wave close over the form of the mourner for ever. She shuddered as she reflected how nearly her dream had been fulfilled; and again thanking the Almighty, who had permitted her timely interference, she arose, and going to the room in which they had sat the preceding evening,

evening, she desired Joanna to tell their guest that breakfast awaited him.

“ Alack, and a well-a-day !” said the old woman, “ he has been gone ever since day-break : he left his best service to you, but he said that his business would not admit of delay. To my mind, ’twas a pity that he would not bide to take a snap of breakfast this cold morning.”—Miriam sighed.—

“ He was a comely looking man. Pray, Miss Merry, what is he called ?”

“ I know not ; I did not ask him.”

“ Where did he come from, Miss ?”

“ That also I am ignorant of. I thought—I hoped—I wished to know many things which this sudden departure, this ——”

“ Good lack ! good lack ! Miss, the kettle has done boiling ever so long, and you have not made the tea,” said Joanna, perceiving the
the

the deep fit of musing into which her young Lady had fallen.

Miriam blushed, and prepared the morning repast ; yet she could not profit by it, though Joanna frequently pressed her, and assured her that the bread was lighter than it had been for several weeks.

“ You grow terribly moody-hearted, Miss,” said Joanna. “ I wish my master was returned, for then it would not be so dull and so lonely, mayhap.”

Miriam started, and bidding Joanna take away the tea equipage, she sat for a few minutes leaning her head upon her hand ; then, as if to disperse melancholy reflection, she walked up the staircase, and along the spacious gallery. Instinctively, as it were, she halted as she reached the door of the room which had so lately contained the
unhappy

unhappy object of her commiseration. Her eye rested for a minute on the lock; she entered, and as she glanced eagerly round, a scrap of paper, with the following words written on it with a pencil, met her wondering sight——

- “ Miriam ! that name a talisman shall be—
“ That name shall sooth my soul, though I should see
“ A thousand griefs, a thousand woes beside
“ Those which oppress'd me when I sought to hide
“ My aching head where noisy waters roll,
“ And boisterous surges rage without controul.
“ Almighty God ! Oh hear a suppliant's prayer,
“ Make the fair Miriam thy peculiar care ;
“ Shield her from every woe, from every pain,
“ Till thy good pleasure calls her home again !”

HENRY.

The soft tears coursed each other quickly down the cheeks of Miriam as she perused these lines.—“ Henry,” cried she

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at last, folding them, and putting them into her pocket-book, "I will preserve these as a sacred relic; it is a grateful offering, and as such I will accept it."

Miriam felt much relieved after the perusal of these lines. This second assurance of his patient acquiescence under misfortune gave her much comfort; and she returned to the great parlour and her usual avocations with some decree of alacrity. Drawing seemed to be just now her favourite pursuit; and she had already portrayed the horrors of a storm, and had sketched the figure of a man standing on a bold projecting rock, as if invoking "the spirits of the tempest." In this figure might already be discovered the likeness of Henry; when Joanna rushed one morning into the room, saying, "Oh Miss Merry! the cook is come, and one of the house-maids, and a footman; and my master,

master, and the new lady, and a mort of fine volks will be down by Saturday."

The drawing was hastily put into the portfolio; the palette and the brushes were laid by as this intelligence reached the ears of our heroine.

CHAP.

CHAP. III.

“ ’Tis true,

“ In marriage gold is all their view ;

“ They seek no beauty, wit, or sense,

“ And love is seldom the pretence.”

GAY.

MR. Fitzpatrick, about ten years before the commencement of this “*petit histoire*,” returned from the East Indies with a princely fortune, and a little girl about seven years of age. The little girl was an orphan, of whose parents Mr. Fitzpatrick had had some knowledge, and this knowledge had induced him

him to become the protector of their child. For the first eight years after her arrival in England, Miriam St. Ledger had been placed at a respectable boarding-school about twenty miles from the metropolis;—proper attention had been paid her by the mistress of the seminary, and Mr. Fitzpatrick had taken her down with him to Tunacombe Castle, a large estate and old edifice, which he had lately purchased, on the borders of Cornwall; when, business calling him suddenly to town, he left his ward in the dilapidated and almost dismantled castle, to the care of old Joanna and Joseph, with a promise of a speedy return. The business which called Mr. Fitzpatrick to town was of a pecuniary nature, and soon transacted;—that which detained him there was of a far different kind.

At a grand dinner, given in honour of him by a great stock-jobber in the city, Mr. Fitzpatrick

patrick was introduced to Miss Lydia Stafford. Educated in the highest style, with very little chance of being able to settle herself according to her wishes, Miss Stafford had for some time been putting herself in the way of stock-jobbers, contractors, and Nabobs. At the age of four-and-twenty, of a pleasing person, and an ancient, though decayed family, she wisely thought that her chance would be greater amongst the people just named, than amongst those nearer St. James's. She knew that fortune was so indispensable a requisite to nobility, that most of our youthful Lords sought for a partner to light them to the torch of Hymen amongst those ladies whose fathers had known how to calculate the *per centums*, and whose grandfathers perhaps—— But we will dismiss illiberal reflections.

Mr.

Mr. Fitzpatrick felt the power of Miss Stafford's charms—she felt the power of his riches. They were soon married, and not till they had been united nearly two years, could Mrs. Fitzpatrick be prevailed on to go with her husband to visit his Cornish castle.

On Mr. Fitzpatrick's return to England, the only inconvenience which he felt annexed to his great possessions, was the orphan Miriam. But let not my readers mistake his character; it was not his solicitude for her happiness—it was not his affection for her person which made him feel uneasy, but it was the idea of his being obliged, in some shape or other, to provide for and maintain her, which lay like a dead weight at his heart. There were reasons which had induced him to become her protector, which he had not avowed to any one; and his early friends, those who had been at school with him, and remem-
bered

bered the traits of selfishness and illiberality which at that æra marked his character, could not help wondering at the change which his residence in India had produced—a climate which is generally thought to corrupt the mind and morals, instead of mending them:—but when those acquaintance sought again to meet their early associate, when they beheld the scornful look, the haughty taciturnity with which the self-important Nabob received them, they discovered the inward and the outward man were still the same, though in one instance he had performed an act of humanity, and sheltered a helpless orphan.

Mr. Fitzpatrick introduced Miriam as a being who would have perished but for his fostering hand, yet he had not the heart or will to treat her as he ought; and he was “quite at a loss what to do with this poor little

little girl, for whose sake he had already done so much, and of whom he was so foolishly fond ;” when it occurred to him that, amongst a few people whom he formerly remembered, he had had a sister. He remembered also (for on this occasion his memory was clear) that she had once possessed just such a heart as would really feel what he only professed for the interesting Miriam. This sister (such had been the injustice of Fortune) was, at the age of fifty, still gaining her bread by instructing and forming the minds of young ladies. With a heart formed to enjoy and ornament a scene of conjugal happiness, it had been Miss Fitzpatrick’s lot to pass unheeded by those who were capable of appreciating her worth, and forming her felicity ; and she resided in a house in which she had lived twenty years, persevering with steadiness, cheerfulness, and
patience,

patience, in the arduous task of instructing youth.

To this woman was our heroine presented by her guardian three months after his return to England. The tears rolled down the pallid cheeks of Miss Fitzpatrick as she received the charge from his hands.—

“These do not flow,” cried she, wiping her eyes, “they do not flow at hearing of your vast riches—they flow, my brother, at beholding the noble use to which you appropriate them. Sweet orphan!” continued she, “I will endeavour to fulfil the duty of a mother to you. More grateful is the trust you have now reposed in me, my brother—far more grateful,” cried the warm-hearted sister, “than if you could have brought me all the treasures of that East which you have just quitted!”

With a disposition like Miss Fitzpatrick's, and delighted as she was with the child of her brother's adoption, terms would never have been thought of, had not the wary Nabob hinted that, as his sister knew the circumstances, he thought she ought to receive Miriam St. Ledger on somewhat lower terms than she did other young ladies.

"Mention it not, brother," cried his sister with warmth; "are we not children of the same parents, and has not a ward of your's a right to my exertions?"

Mr. Fitzpatrick was delighted with his sister; he even mentioned, as he shook hands with her at parting, his intention of sending her a gold muslin; but the gold muslin was never thought of by either party afterwards.

Miriam St. Ledger, during the six years which she resided with Miss Fitzpatrick,

knew

knew no solicitude, no care; her little heart had found a safe deposit for all its thoughts, an object on whom to bestow all its love. Of an amiable and affectionate disposition, of a quick and lively apprehension, of strong sense, of gentle manners, insinuating countenance, and interesting person, she soon became so great a favourite of her instructress, that for her sake (having realized a decent independency) Miss Fitzpatrick declined her school two years after receiving her, and dedicated to her her whole time and attention. She instructed her in useful branches of learning and in polite accomplishments; she formed her manners, and she forgot not her heart. She taught her attentive little auditor to consider the charms of person and the graces of manner as of little importance in themselves, yet too often the consequence

of great danger to the possessor. She taught her to appreciate the virtues of the heart beyond every outward and specious ornament ; she taught her to expect trials in her journey through life ; and she taught her to remember that He who formed the weakest of his creatures, was able to support her under them.

All this Miss Fitzpatrick taught, and all this Miriam thought she had learned ; yet when her benevolent, her single-hearted friend died, she resigned herself for many weeks to the deepest despair.—Miss Fitzpatrick died suddenly. She had made no will, of course her little property devolved to her nearest relation—her Nabob brother, who like the great leviathan, swallowed up every thing he came near.

CHAP. IV.

- “ So black an imp would pull, I do suppose,
“ A bulse of di'monds from a Begum's nose ;
“ Or make, like Doulah, careless of his soul,
“ A new edition of the old black hole.”

PETER PINDAR.

ONCE more obliged to take our heroine under his protection, and not knowing what else to do with her, Mr. Fitzpatrick took her down with him to Tunacombe, as has been before related. The whole world was now a cheerless void to Miriam. She who alone in that vast expanse had sheltered, had

c 3 comforted,

comforted, and had loved her—she was fled for ever; and had her guardian proposed confining her from the light of day, and from all intercourse with her fellow-creatures, she would not have made any opposition. She felt that she could never love him; she felt uneasy in his presence, hurt at his free manner, wounded by his remarks on her dependant state, which were very frequent during their journey; and when in his pleasant moods he attempted to be jocular, and smiling, would call her “his little charity girl,” the blood would rush to her cheeks, and many moments would elapse ere she could conquer the indignation which she felt at his unfeeling barbarity.

Left to the care of old Joanna and Jonathan, for nearly two years entirely secluded from every other society, nothing but a strong

strong mind and great resolution could have supported her in such a situation. Happily, Miriam possessed both ; she saw the necessity of exertion, and she did not suffer herself to relax into supineness ; every study, every pursuit which had been recommended by her deceased friend, she practised, and improved herself in with the most scrupulous vigilance.

Mr. Fitzpatrick had sent her the books, the instruments, the materials for drawing, and work which had belonged to his sister. Miriam looked on them as sacred relics; she fancied her friend was present while she used them; her imagination often pictured her pleasing form, her mild countenance, bending over, and instructing her; she would often start at the portrait drawn by her too faithful memory, and shed tears of anguish

anguish at the bitter certainty of her being gone for ever.

Thus passed two years, unenlivened by any incident, unenbrightened by one cheerful occurrence, when one evening, in the latter end of the month of March, to dissipate heavy reflection, and to dispel the lassitude which had taken possession of her mind, Miriam resolved to encounter the bleak winds and threatening storm, rather than remain within doors; and, gaining the point of the cliff, introduced herself to a stranger in the manner before related.

Mr. Fitzpatrick's marrying a woman destitute of fortune, may appear to my readers like a contradiction to his general character; but next to gaining wealth, the allying himself to a family of distinction had been his darling wish: the first accomplished, the
second

second he found far more easy. Miss Stafford had been recommended to him by the stock-jobber, at whose house he met her. The stock-jobber's Lady had received a hint from Miss Lydia, which she fully understood, and explained to her husband; and the matrimonial business was soon settled. The cadaverous countenance of Mr. Fitzpatrick, and his being twenty years older than herself, were both overlooked by Miss Stafford in the contemplation of her elegant wardrobe and splendid establishment; for though a niggard and a miser where either charity or assistance were required, yet in the ostentatious display of his riches, or to impress an idea of his importance, he would be profuse even to prodigality; to vie with Nobility, to exceed them in shew, equipage, and parade, he spared no expence; and he

refused no request of his bride's, fully impressed with the idea of her sense, taste, and understanding when he contemplated the genealogical tree of her family, with which she had presented him on her marriage, and perceived that in more than one or two branches she claimed kindred with some of the first families in Great Britain.

The uncomfortable and mutilated state of Tunacombe, which he had not disguised from Mrs. Fitzpatrick, did not impress her with any ideas in its favour; and when he mentioned its distance from cultivated society, or indeed any society at all, his Lady would shrug her shoulders, and exclaim—"In the name of Fortune, dear Fitz, what could tempt you to purchase it?"

The Nabob would then draw up his features, and, with an air of vast importance, explain

explain to her the consequence he had gained in the county by being the possessor of so vast a tract of land, with no one to interfere with him.

“ Never, my dear Mrs. Fitzpatrick,” would he add, “ will I ask you to accompany me there, without you can prevail on some of your friends to go with you :—I wish, I own, to render it habitable ; but I shall do nothing to it till I have your opinion.”

These answers always flattered the pride of the lady. However, on one pretext or other, the journey was delayed, till hearing that a speedy dissolution of Parliament was expected, Mr. Fitzpatrick resolved to set out immediately, and to endeavour to make friends among the Cornish boors, as he termed them, and be returned as representative for one of their boroughs.”

Mrs. Fitzpatrick was quite vexed to leave London so early ; but by entreaties, prayers, and presents, she gained over a few friends, who nobly resolved, in the cause of friendship, to bury themselves for a few weeks in an old Cornish castle.

The idea of again seeing her guardian gave no comfort to the mind of Miriam.—
“ I shall only hear of my dependance on him,” cried she : “ I shall only be told that the clothes I wear, I receive from him ; that the bread I eat, is his ; that I am the creature of his bounty, the destitute child of his compassion ! Compassion, and did Mr. Fitzpatrick ever feel compassion ? Did the tear ever start to his eye as he looked at me, as I have watched it in that of his lamented sister ? Ah ! no, no ; the feeling which induced him to protect the hapless Miriam is undefinable,

undefinable, but it could not be compassion ; compassion would have soothed the object whom it shielded, would have feared to utter a word which might renew the remembrance of obligation, would have poured oil into the wounds of early affliction, not have sought each moment to apply the bitter caustic of recapitulating his bounty and his kindness. I remember the obligations I am under ; my heart aches under them. Ah ! would that I had died when an infant, that I had breathed my last ere I had been consigned to his ostentatious care ; and yet," added Miriam, " how foolish, how wicked is it thus to murmur ! Is not my life given me by my Creator ? Are not these trials beheld by him ? And is not the impious wish, which I have just formed, as sinful in his eyes as that attempt which

which filled me with horror to behold in the unhappy stranger? Oh! there I beheld a wonder-working Providence indeed! Had not I been placed in this deserted spot, who would have seen the frantic Henry—who would have snatched the madly-daring youth from sin, from death, from destruction? That reflection surely brings comfort with it. To save a fellow-creature's life, to save the life of Henry, I would be content to drag out my lengthened years, unknowing and unknown, in this deserted mansion."

Although our heroine dreaded the arrival of Mr. Fitzpatrick, yet was there a latent hope that his Lady might be amiable.

"And if she is amiable, I am sure I shall love her," whispered Miriam to herself, as she indulged the pleasing idea. Anxious to conciliate the regard of her protector's wife, she

she exerted her every art and skill to decorate and adorn the castle against the arrival of its owners.—Mr. Fitzpatrick had had the antique furniture of the mansion included in his purchase. The house had been nearly half a century uninhabited, but by domestics; the fretted windows were placed so high as to appear contiguous with the roof of the large and gloomy hall, whose stone floor and walls, “furred round with mouldy damp and ropy slime,” gave not one cheering idea at the entrance into the venerable mansion. This room was decorated all round the top with the heads and horns of stags, the trophies of former days; while rusty armour, long left to remain in quiet, added to the sombre gloom which pervaded the room. The spacious old dining-room was floored and wainscotted with black oak; the tables cor-

responded with it, and the room looked as if arrayed in fable. The smaller room was hung with tapestry, and was by far the liveliest, although the story portrayed on the hangings was very affecting—namely, Abraham offering up his son Isaac ;—but the innocent little Isaac was arrayed in scarlet, his father wore a robe of yellow, and the angel had a coat of many colours ; so that, though those colours were somewhat faded, yet, to apply the language of the moderns to the work of the ancients, the *trio* might still be said to cut a dash. The furniture had once been crimson damask, though now, moth-eaten and faded, it looked like an emblem of degraded vanity.

While Miriam cast her eyes round the apartments, she could not help wondering at Mr. Fitzpatrick bringing down a wife, and
a group

a group of friends, in its deserted state ; but eager to make herself useful, and hoping to gain the esteem of Mrs. Fitzpatrick, she saw every room and every ancient bed properly aired for the company.

The town housemaid had " already got so *wiolent* a cold and *hoarse* with the journey, as to be *obleeged* to keep her chamber ;" she of course could not assist, and Joanna's time was somewhat taken up in administering to the " *wiolent* cold and *hoarse*."

The cook sat in the housekeeper's room lamenting the weak state of " her *narves* ; the first view of the castle had quite made her unfit for any thing ; and William she said was so noisy and so inattentive on the road, that really he had fatigued her to death."—But William had determined to be no longer noisy, for he had gone five miles
to

to the market-town, and picking up some *bon* companions, whom he had known when he last visited the castle, he had contented himself with them, and had not again made his appearance at Tunacombe. Joanna was working herself to death upstairs; old Joseph was eternally sweeping and cleaning in the offices; and Miriam racking her brains to add to the comfort of the apartments, and to render them habitable.

CHAP. V.

“ The galling sneer, the supercilious frown,
“ The strange reserve, the proud affected state
“ Of upstart knaves grown rich, and fools grown great.”

CHURCHILL.

AT length the day came so eagerly panted for by Miriam—the day which was once more, after a seclusion of two years, to introduce her to a new friend, and to elegant society. How did her heart beat as she parted the brown tresses on her forehead ! How did her hands tremble as she put on the

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the white robe, in which she was to be introduced to the wife of her guardian !

A servant had in the morning announced the near approach of the family. The cook seemed to be animated at the news ; and, bidding defiance to “ weak nerves,” set about the dinner. The housemaid left her cold and hoarseness in her apartment, and tripped through the rooms with her usual mincing steps ; and fortunately Tom met with his fellow-servant at the inn, and returned with him ; and the family at the castle seemed to be in regular order, when two carriages, attended by servants, &c. drove down the avenue. On hearing the sound of the wheels, Miriam, without knowing what she was about, ran to her chamber ; respiration, sense, recollection, every thing seemed denied her ; her head beat as though
it

it would burst ; her limbs trembled violently, till, after a few minutes, a flood of tears relieved her full, her expecting heart.

Joanna, the simple-hearted Joanna, followed her.—“ Don’t cry, dear Miss Merry,” said she ; “ don’t be afraid to see master ; I warrant he won’t scold you ; he can’t sure, if he looks in your face ; and the new Madam, I warrant she’ll be as glad as a bird of such a nice company keeper in this lonesome place.”

“ I cannot account for my feelings,” cried Miriam ; “ but, my good Joanna, I must try to go down ; my guardian will be pleased with my prompt appearance.”

“ Aye to be sure, that’s what he will,” said Joanna, as she staid a minute after Miriam, to adjust her own homely coif at the glass, that she might not be, to use her own

own term, a "figure of fun" amongst "genteel grand servants."

At the door of the great parlour Miriam met a footman, who opened it, and she entered. The room was vacant as far as she could discern; but the high back of the old settee, which was drawn towards the fireplace, might perhaps conceal some of the persons she came to see. Miriam advanced. A lady reclined on the settee; her hat and gloves were thrown carelessly on the table; her slippers were kicked at some distance from her on the floor; her eyes were half closed, and Miriam was about to retire as softly as she could, when the fair recliner gave a violent and shrill scream, which resounded through the edifice, and which called together a group of spectators. Miriam faltered out an apology for her interruption.

"In

“ In the name of Fortune, who are you ?” said the lady ; “ the spirit of the castle, for I am sure the old building contains them ?”

“ No, my dear Mrs. Fitzpatrick,” said her husband, as he now walked up to the settee, “ this is my little charity girl that I told you of. How do you do, Merry—how do you do, my girl ? This is my wife, and I desire that from henceforth you treat her with all proper respect.”

“ Lord ! Fitz,” said his Lady, “ you told me she was a child.”

“ And so she is, so she is—so she was,” said the Nabob, now fixing his wondering twinklers on his ward. “ Why, Merry, why, child, you are grown out of knowledge : I declare I hardly know you ; let me see, how old are you ?”

“ Eighteen,” answered Miriam.

“ Ah,

“ Ah, indeed, so it is ; you were sixteen when I saw you last, so you were.”

“ And where has she been these two years ?” said Mrs. Fitzpatrick, relaxing her features a little.

“ Here in this house.”

“ What alone ?”

“ Yes, Madam,” cried Miriam, with quickness. “ Two years have I remained in this castle, and during that time I have only seen the two old persons who take care of it, or the peasants who reside in its vicinity.”

Miriam blushed. At the moment she spoke she had forgotten the stranger ; but she could not now recal her words.

“ Is it possible ?” said a soft voice.

Miriam turned her head, and beheld the fine blue eyes of a lady fixed on her face.

A fat

A fat portly gentleman stood beside her; his figure, and the expression of his countenance, made her almost smile.

“Well, will it do, my friend?” said Mr. Fitzpatrick.

“Yes, yes, I’m in hopes it will. I’ve desired the cook to put in vinegar directly.”

“And if eatable,” returned Mr. Fitzpatrick, “we may venture to say that it is the first cod ever eaten in this mansion.”

Mrs. Fitzpatrick arose from the settee, saying to Miriam, “Come, child, shew me some of the rooms above stairs, that I may try to select one for myself, and some for my friends. Will you go with us, Mrs. Stafford?” turning as she spoke to the lady with the blue eyes.

She was answered in the affirmative; and Mrs. Stafford, with a smile, taking the arm of our heroine, went up stairs. Every room

caused fresh exclamations and fresh looks of horror from its mistress.—“ I vow,” exclaimed she at last, in an indignant tone, “ nothing but the consequence, which I know I shall give Fitzpatrick by my own presence, and that of my friends, should persuade me to take up my residence here a single night.”

“ And yet,” said Mrs. Stafford, in a low tone of voice, “ this young lady has inhabited it—inhabited it alone, for nearly two years.”

“ Lord! my dear Stafford, she was obliged to be here you know ; and a better place in the whole earth, I think, could not be found for a girl without friends, connections, family, or fortune.”

“ It was a very good place to prevent her forming any improper connections,” returned Mrs. Stafford; “ but how cheerless, how desolate,

desolate, how pitiable, must have been such an existence !”

Mrs. Stafford heaved a sigh : she seemed to feel as she spoke ; yet there was not a single variation of voice, or alteration of manner, during the whole sentence.

Miriam looked at her with gratitude. She thought she perceived the tears starting to her eyes, and she hastily turned her head.

“ This being the state-room in former times,” exclaimed Mrs. Fitzpatrick, entering a large chamber, the furniture of which had once been yellow and gold, “ this I appropriate for the use of the Honourable Mr. and Mrs. Stafford.”

Mrs. Stafford heaved another sigh ; the colour heightened in her cheek.

“ When do you think Mr. Stafford will be here ?”

“ I don’t know ;—in less than a week I believe ; but pardon me, Mrs. Fitzpatrick—I cannot occupy this great apartment during his absence. You know how timid I am ; I should be frightened all night, and agitated all day. I dare say my young friend here will let me share her bed till Mr. Stafford comes.”

“ I shall be both honoured and flattered,” exclaimed Miriam with warmth.

Mrs. Fitzpatrick turned her dark eyes full upon her, and said—“ I protest the girl has gained emphasis and manner in her solitary residence !” Then addressing herself again to her visiter, she added—“ Pray sleep where you like, my dear ; but I know my uncle, the Honourable Mr. Stafford,” laying a stress on the word, “ will not be pleased unless he has the state chamber.”

“ He is fonder of state than I am,” said Mrs. Stafford, yet lower than before.

“ And

"And yet I thought that you had a *penchant* for state also about three months since," said Mrs. Fitzpatrick, in rather a sharp tone of voice.—The colour grew deeper than before ; it overspread the whole frame of Mrs. Stafford at this sarcastic speech. She answered not, however, and Mrs. Fitzpatrick went to another suite of apartments, and having fixed on two for Alderman Caxon and his nephew, she retired to the one she had before chosen for herself, leaving Miriam with Mrs. Stafford.

"Now shew me your room, my dear," said Mrs. Stafford, after standing in a musing posture for a few moments.

"It is nothing more than a large closet," said Miriam, as she led the way ; "and I fear you will retract from your kind offer of sharing it with me when you see it."

“ No, I shall not I am sure,” was the like
answer, as Miriam opened the door of her dest
room, which, from having gathered together my
all her books, work, drawings, &c. wore an left
appearance of life and activity, which was
not perceptible in any other part of the Mu
house. her

“ Oh this little chamber charms me !” no
said Mrs. Stafford ; yet her voice was not tric
raised, nor did her countenance appear more aff
animated than before.—“ Your drawings na
are very pretty ; some of them are done yo
capitally !” continued she, walking round it.
and viewing them. She stopped at the
storm, which had been so well portrayed, Sl
and which Miriam had pinned opposite to af
the bed. “ This too,” said she—“ did you w
do this ? Where, I mean, did you witness, w
did you ever see, did you behold a storm tr

like

like this? It appears as if it menaced the destruction of humanity. Pray take it away, my dear girl; I should never sleep if you left it here!"

The tears no longer stood in the eyes of Mrs. Stafford—they rolled down her cheeks; her voice was mellow, low, and plaintive; no alteration had taken place in that, yet the trickling fluid shewed that she was deeply affected.

"I knew not that my humble copy from nature could have power thus to agitate you," said Miriam, as she was going to unpin it.

"Let me look again," said Mrs. Stafford. She firmly grasped the hand of Miriam, and after a few moments, said—"Did you ever witness a scene like this—this awful, this tremendous one?"

“ Yes,” said Miriam, “ I have ; this rocky coast is particularly striking in a storm, and I have been filled with sublime delight when viewing its inexpressible grandeur.”

Mrs. Stafford walked to the window ; she seemed not to attend to her, and Miriam hastily laid her drawing in her portfolio. After many minutes of silence, Mrs. Stafford held out her hand. Miriam eagerly caught it, and, in the enthusiasm of gratitude for her kind attention, she pressed it to her lips.

“ I mean not to alarm your delicacy, Miss St. Ledger,” said Mrs. Stafford, “ by informing you I know the particulars of your situation. What I am going to say, is from an earnest desire to render that situation tolerable ; of your new protectress I am now about to speak, and think me not treacherous alike to every human creature, if I
give

give you a few traits of her character. We are connected; not drawn together by the strong cords of friendship. She professes a great deal of that passion for me at present; but, alas! I know its source, and lament her having recourse to so shallow an artifice. Vanity and ambition are the reigning passions of her soul. I am the last person on the face of this earth, perhaps, who ought to mention those passions as conspicuous in another; I who—but let me hint to you, that if you pay her attention and deference, you may expect to be treated with some degree of mildness. She has never been used to controul; she has always given free latitude to her speech; hence remarks, which in others would wound to the quick, from her are heard with indifference. She has unbounded power over Mr. Fitzpatrick; she

entirely manages him, and yet does it so adroitly, that she makes him imagine he reigns absolute. Fond of admiration, she cannot exist without it; a coquette from nature, habit, and education, she cannot discard the dangerous propensity even when she has chosen a partner for life; and Charles Mortimer, the nephew of Alderman Caxon, has attended her from town, the most devoted of her slaves. Attract not his notice, my dear Miriam; if you mean to enjoy any portion of ease, avoid him—shun him if he bestows any of his attention on you; for the moment that you rival your protectress, that moment will, I fear, be portentous. I have alarmed you—I see I have: I am sorry for it, yet I could not remain silent. I cannot dress to-day. Mrs. Fitzpatrick must excuse me.”

Mrs.

Mrs. Stafford quitted the room without adding another word ; and she left Miriam trembling and sinking under a variety of different emotions and different apprehensions.

To define, to inspect characters, to search for the cause which had produced the effect, had been, while resident with Miss Fitzpatrick, the favourite study of Miriam ; yet often had she found it a painful one ; often had she shrunk back when she had discovered meanness, envy, jealousy, and a thousand lurking passions where she had anticipated all that was noble, sincere, and praiseworthy ; often had she blushed for poor human nature, and as often had she delightedly turned to her instructress ; every feeling of the heart there met the eye at once—benevolence, religion, meekness, charity, that charity

portrayed in the Gospel—charity in thought, in speech, and action—such a contemplation was delightful !

“ Ah ! ” cried Miriam, as Mrs. Stafford left her, “ ah ! why cruel, yet kind Mrs. Stafford, why did you unfold to me the deceitful mazes of so black a heart ? Why alarm me with so disgusting a portrait ? And is it really true, after two years spent in irksome solitude—is the first hour of my restoration to society teeming with cares, with apprehensions ? Yet what have I to apprehend whilst secure in conscious innocence, in rectitude of heart, in purity of intention ? Oh Almighty God ! ” said Miriam, piously bending to the ground, “ thou who protectest the innocent, behold me, thy feeble creature ;—strengthen me in all my trials ; and while my heart is free

5

from

from offence, Oh let not the wicked come near to hurt me !”

Miriam rose from the ground ; her spirits seemed to have gained strength from her having poured out the spontaneous effusions of her innocent mind to the throne of Mercy ; and she obeyed the summons to the dining-room with a composed air and steady step.

But, as I wish my readers to form a just idea of the persons and manners of the five people who were already seated there, I shall, in the succeeding chapter, try to describe them.

CHAP. VI.

“ And each instructed feature has its rule.”

LYTTLETON.

MRS. Fitzpatrick, who, as mistress of the house, presided at the table, shall of course preside in this chapter.—Above the common height, and finely formed, her person gave an idea of majesty ; nor did her countenance contradict it. The commanding look which reigned on her high-arched eyebrows ; the quick, the severe glance from her

her dark penetrating eyes; the decided voice, the graceful utterance, all evinced a polish which had been acquired in the higher circles.

Acquired indeed—the grace, the majesty of Mrs. Fitzpatrick's deportment were acquired; an adept in the school of the world, she had early studied, and had early succeeded in appearing with the ease and breeding of *ton*. Her passions were by nature violent; she had never been used to govern them, and she only kept them in subordination while she thought it forwarded her interest or her plans. She had been long declared a beauty, yet it was that kind of beauty which, though striking at the first view, fails to interest:—no feminine softness ever melted in her eye; never was the fearful, the timid blush seen to rise on her cheek;

cheek ; never did half-formed accents tremble on her lips ;—in short, she seemed so perfectly conscious of her own importance, so competent to act, to judge, to speak for herself, that the eye which first rested on her graceful form with admiration, often turned away disgusted at the contemplation of feminine helplessness attempting a character so very unprepossessing. She presided at her table with all that ease which she had so deeply studied ; she gave the lead to conversation ; she decided in a manner, which few attempted to controvert, on the merits of every topic which occurred. She looked on Fitzpatrick merely as she would have done on a piece of mechanism, which it was proper to place at the bottom of the table ; and while he occupied that seat, her behaviour, in conformity to her long established system,

system, was guided by the strict rules of politeness and fine breeding. She held his understanding, his person, and manners in very great contempt. One appendage belonging to him, however, ensured her respect.—“Fortune ! thou idol of the world, how hast thou the power to make charms, where without thee all would be disgusting and abhorred !”

Perhaps never was there a greater contrast to her hostess, either in person or manners, than she who was seated at her right-hand. Mrs. Stafford’s delicate form seemed unfit to encounter any of the storms, scarcely the common difficulties of life. Her complexion was of the most transparent kind ; her cheeks were not tinged by red, except when her name was hastily pronounced ; then a faint tinge would mantle over them
for

for a moment, and in another vanish, and leave no trace behind. Her mild blue eyes, her flaxen hair, heightened the delicacy of expression which was portrayed on her countenance, yet was it the only expression discoverable. No quick glance from the corner of her eye announced the pointed retort; no roguish dimple played around her mouth; no sportive folly fell from her lips. An habitual smile, of a pensive, melancholy kind, seemed to have fixed its seat for ever on her features. Her voice was low and monotonous. She never presumed to speak or act, scarcely to think for herself; and, from constant habit, she had at last attained a second kind of imbecility, mental as well as bodily.

Alderman Caxon, the friend of Mr. Fitzpatrick, and a man of great consequence in the vicinity of Gower Street, was a thick, round

round personage, whose mouth was conveniently capacious for its owner, and could be extended to twice its usual length when a flavoury viand smoked near it; his tongue could also be eloquent on a favourite subject, a City feast, or a Lord-Mayor's dinner. Nothing would have tempted him to accompany Fitzpatrick to Cornwall, but the consolation he hoped to receive from a few election dinners, and the consequence which he derived from being hand and glove with a Nabob.

Young Mortimer, the nephew and reputed heir of Caxon, had received from him a liberal and genteel education. He had a good share of understanding, and a graceful exterior; he had associated with young men of fashion, and had acquired pleasing manners. He had also acquired the appellation of "a man of gallantry."

What

What a prostitution of words ! Gallantry is the term by which we gloss over the most glaring vices of society !—Such a man, a man initiated in intrigue ere he had gained the age of twenty-two, had been invited by Mrs. Fitzpatrick to the castle.

“ Oh !” says my youthful reader, who has never yet entered into the wicked mazes of fashion, “ what a pity that she did not know his character !”

“ Ah my sweet novice, may you long, long retain that beautiful simplicity !”

Mrs. Fitzpatrick did know the notoriety of Mortimer's character ; she had often heard the “ good-for-nothing creature” extolled by the ladies, and she resolved on his accompanying her to the castle, that she might *pour passer le tems* revenge his conduct to the sex by the force of her charms, which

which she resolved should have a wonderful effect on him. In these arrangements Mrs. Fitzpatrick never thought of consequences; she only consulted her own whim, and thought a little *badinage* in the country would help to fill up the tedious hours. Mr. Fitzpatrick has already been portrayed at full length. Suffice it to add for the present, that nothing more unlike the thing he meant to represent (*viz.* a gentleman), could ever be seated at the bottom of a table.

“ Oh Miss St. Ledger! we had almost forgotten you,” said Mrs. Fitzpatrick, in a pleasing voice, as she entered; but glancing her eye, with a quick look of enquiry, at Mortimer, and seeing him rising to place a chair for her, she added, “ Come, pray seat yourself, child.”

“ Aye,

“ Aye, come and sit by me, Merry, my little girl,” said Fitzpatrick, nodding his head without looking from his plate ; “ you used to sit by me ; but ’tis a long time ago now, is not it, my girl ?”

Miriam felt distressed ; the severe glance of Mrs. Fitzpatrick, the indelicate manner of her guardian, and the fixed regard of Mortimer, all contributed to confuse her ; till casting round her eyes, and meeting the gentle look of Mrs. Stafford, she was a little reassured, and took her seat by her guardian.

“ You don’t seem to like this said fish, however, Mortimer,” cried Mrs. Fitzpatrick, with a sort of piqued expression on her countenance.

“ Me, Ma’am ! you mistake,” said he, colouring, and resuming his knife and fork ;
“ I think ——”

“ Why,

“ Why, I’m sure you must think it delicious,” said the Alderman, without looking at his nephew. “ For my part I declare, my good friend, I am surprised at its coming in such wonderful fine preservation. I am sorry to be so troublesome, my good Lady, but I must thank you for a little more of the fine fellow.”

Mrs. Fitzpatrick was no epicure, but she prided herself in knowing how to help every thing which was set before her.

“ Nobody,” said Caxon, grinning delightedly, “ nobody understands how to help like you, Mrs. Fitzpatrick. Don’t I often say to you, Mortimer, now don’t I often say, I like to dine with Mrs. Fitzpatrick, because I am sure to have what I like ?”

Mortimer had penetration ; he had seen, he had understood the reproof of Mrs. Fitzpatrick ;

Fitzpatrick ; and, too wise to err again, he answered quickly—" And did I not always agree with you, my dear Sir ?"

" Aye, I believe you did ; but you are easy about your eating, Mortimer.—(I'll trouble you, Ma'am, for a little more sauce.)—You an't particular you know.—(Soy and cayenne.)—You can dine, you have often told me, on cold meat.—(A glass of Madeira.) Now that I never could : once I remember I tried too ; but, Lord help me, how disagreeable it was ! All the afternoon I seemed to have lost something, and I felt as if 'twas before dinner, so at last I was fairly obliged to go to supper two whole hours earlier than usual ; but that happened a long, long time ago, and I have never tried it since, and hope I never shall again."

" I

“ I hope you will never think of it while you are here,” said Mrs. Fitzpatrick, in the most graceful accents ; “ and assure yourself, Mr. Caxon, that while I continue to please my friends, I must be happy myself.”

“ Thank ye, thank ye, good Lady !” said Caxon, delightedly.

Mortimer was silent, and Fitzpatrick, rubbing his hands, exclaimed—“ Spoken like a Nabobefs, Lady. Well said, faith ! d’ye hear, Merry ? There’s a speech for you, my girl !—‘ While I continue to please my friends, I must be happy myself.’—Wasn’t that it, Mrs. Fitzpatrick ?”

Mrs. Fitzpatrick nodded ; and I fear by this time my readers are weary of *bon bouche*.

CHAP. VII.

“ Yet may you rather feel that virtuous pain,
“ Than sell your violated charms for gain—
“ Than wed the wretch whom you despise or hate,
“ For the vain glare of useless wealth or state !”

LYTTLETON.

“**M**R. Mortimer is a pleasant young man ; you will think him so, Miss St. Ledger,” said Mrs. Fitzpatrick, taking her by the arm, and leading her to the breakfast-parlour, Mrs. Stafford having quitted them.
“ But let me caution you in regard to your
conduct.”

conduct. Your's is a delicate situation, my dear. No mother, no parent, no relative, and under the protection of so young a woman as myself, a thousand little things must be attended to which in other situations would be wholly immaterial."

"I am aware," said Miriam, "fully aware of the helplessness of my situation, of the——"

"Listen," said Mrs. Fitzpatrick. "Fitzpatrick has proved himself your friend; the care hitherto taken of you by him is now transmitted to me; a female is more adequate to the task of advising and directing one of her own sex. I have no doubt of your attention to my advice, and I doubt not of seeing you, by my means, settled in life, with an establishment equal to your most sanguine wishes."

Miriam was fixed in wonder.

Mrs. Fitzpatrick proceeded.—“Mortimer you must guard against ; you have seen no young men, and may probably think him a nonfuch, which he will take pains enough to make you believe ; but he can't marry a portionless girl without irretrievably offending his old uncle, and consequently starving ; and I know Mortimer too well to suspect him of being guilty of so great an absurdity. But he is versed in intrigue, and he will probably attack you with soft speeches, to which you must turn a deaf ear ; for I know where his affections are engaged irrevocably. I say the more to you, my dear, as Mr. Fitzpatrick desired me to caution you on the subject.

Miriam listened in mute astonishment. She perceived the motives which induced Mrs. Fitzpatrick to be thus lavish of her advice ;

but

but believed herself too insignificant for Mortimer to bestow a thought on, while on her part she had scarcely noticed him. (Miriam was yet to learn that her person could not fail to interest where it had once been seen.)—After a little hesitation, she answered that she was obliged to Mrs. Fitzpatrick for her advice ; but she felt too much her own obscurity to suppose she should become an object of notice.

“ You don’t know the world, Miss St. Ledger ; how should you indeed—you that have so long lived a recluse in this *terra incognita*, as I must call it ? But pray come and help to sort the cards—I’ve got them here in my work-bag. Poor Stafford is already dying of *ennui*, and we must set her down to Cassino as soon as the tea is over.”

Miriam poured out the tea while Mr. and Mrs. Fitzpatrick, Mrs. Stafford, and Mortimer sat down to a crown rubber at Cassino. Mr. Caxon was taking his afternoon's nap in the dining-room. When he joined the company, he was desired to make one at the card-table; his nephew cut out. Miriam, little interested in their arrangements, slid out of the room.

In the gallery she was met by Joanna.—
“ Oh goodness me! now, my dear Miss, I see you once again; I declare it does me good to see a face I know. Lord! what a pack of 'em there is below stairs! Lackaday, Miss, what a world we do live in! and you and I and poor Joseph, three quiet souls, we know nothing of what's doing in it.”

“ True, my good Joanna, and happy is our ignorance, perhaps.”

“ Law,

“ Law, Miss ! Well, may be so ; but, dear me, what d’ye think Madam Stafford’s maid says, that her mistress, that *young* Lady, is the wife of my new Madam’s uncle ! Lord ! only to think, for I suppose he’s up seventy or more ! Should you ever have thought it, Miss ? ”

“ No, I should not indeed, but that I heard Mrs. Fitzpatrick mention it.”

“ Well, Miss, I hope to God she will be kind-hearted to you, for you are kind-hearted to every one. Ah, Miss Merry ! I have often thought of the gentleman that you gave a night’s lodging to ; to my fancy he was a comely man, although he seemed in great trouble. I wonder what ’twas could make him so *malancholy* ; he was very young to have seen much trouble.”

“ Neither youth nor age are exempt from the shafts of misfortune, Joanna ; they are aimed indiscriminately : and though bitter are the pangs which they cause, yet are we obliged to receive them. We ought to bear them with uncomplaining fortitude ; and if we are unconscious of deserving them—if we ourselves have not expedited their approach, how much lighter must they feel than when augmented by the horrors of guilt ! But the stranger, I think with you, Joanna, was young to have suffered acute calamity. I think he was unfortunate, for surely vice has not yet touched his heart !”

The company were still engaged at Cassino when Miriam re-entered. Mortimer was leaning over the back of Mrs. Fitzpatrick’s chair, on whom she seemed to bestow more attention than on her cards.

“ Miriam,” said Mr. Fitzpatrick, “ sit down,

down, and play a tune to amuse Mr. Mortimer. Come sing a song; you used to sing I remember. Come, you can't have forgot I'm sure."

Miriam coloured, but obeyed. She had removed all her music except one book of Handel's, that the parlour might not be crowded unnecessarily; and she sat down, and played and sung from memory a lively simple air;—while Mortimer turned over the leaves of the book which he had taken up, and seemed perfectly inattentive to her; but when she had ended, he came forwards, saying—"Here is a beautiful thing! Pray play it; the first lines are so applicable (lowering his voice) to my sentiments." Then, in an emphatic manner, as he placed the book before her, he said—

"Oh had I Jubal's lyre,

"Or Miriam's tuneful voice!"

laying a stress on the word "Miriam," which could not be misconstrued.

Miriam, without noticing his gallantry, began the song, and had nearly got through it, when Mrs. Fitzpatrick exclaimed, in an angry tone—"Lord help ye, Mr. Fitzpatrick, how can you play so? Why did you not take up the six and the three? But it's no wonder—this music must distract the head."

Mortimer gaily turned round, saying—"Let me scold for you;" and Miriam broke off abruptly, and walked to the fire.

"Oh it's no matter; we've lost the rubber, that's all," said Mrs. Fitzpatrick.

"And now let me resign my seat to you," said Mrs. Stafford, turning to Mortimer. He accepted her offer, and Mrs. Stafford taking the arm of Miriam, led her up stairs.

"Ah,

“ Ah, dear girl, how I pity you !” said she, in her usual low tone, as they entered their chamber ; “ already do your native attractions fill the breast of Mrs. Fitzpatrick with jealousy—already does she watch the very eyes of Mortimer, who, poor fellow ! is more shackled than if he were married.”

“ Ah, Madam !” said Miriam, deeply affected, and trembling in every nerve, “ how should I sustain myself but for your kind attention ?”

“ Be assured of that ; already do you possess my warmest regard,” returned Mrs. Stafford, pressing her hand.—“ I have known, I have felt, Miss St. Ledger, the misery of being without an adviser, a participater, a confidante. Oh ! had I been blessed with one, I might have resisted the prospects, the allurements, the —— I am ill qualified,

my love, for a mentor, but I am sincere ;—though I may not instruct, though I may not improve, I will never betray. Mrs. Fitzpatrick looks on me as a cipher, an automaton :—I feel unequal to oppose, or contend with her ; and I give up, and pass over silently, what I ought not to treat so leniently. She knows that her words have often power to cut me to the soul ; and did I dare oppose her, or utter a dissenting syllable, she would revenge herself by tearing open those wounds which are yet scarcely healed in my bosom. You look interested, my dear girl. Alas ! I have no right to awaken the interest of any one. Your speaking countenance asks why am I an associate with a woman whom I despise. We were always brought up in habits of intimacy, and my recent connection with
her

her family" (Mrs. Stafford's eyes fell to the ground as she spoke) "does not allow my dereliction now without an eternal breach. Miss St. Ledger, never let ambition enter your breast; it is the bane of happiness—it is the root of every destructive passion. Mrs. Fitzpatrick and I acted nearly alike; our motives too at the time were probably the same, but soon we widely differed; my never easy conscience has taken from me every zest for pleasure, pomp, and shew, which I once thought warranted the greatest of sacrifices; and I bear about with me a stinging which poisons every moment of existence. Mrs. Fitzpatrick feels not this; she is insensible to every thing but the world, its blandishments, and its pleasures; and she has often called me a poor coward for stopping short with all these enjoyments in view.

Ah!

Ah! could I ever forget the folly of my conduct? Can I cease to mourn the vanity which robbed me of the, the — Come, Miss St. Ledger, let us join the company. Act in conformity to your own feelings, my dear girl; your manner, your accents, your looks assure me they will never lead you astray.”

Miriam once more joined the company; but her thoughts were fixed on only one object. The half-repressed speech of Mrs. Stafford, the melancholy which seemed rooted in her heart, the upbraidings of her own conduct, the confession which she seemed ever ready to make, all filled her with curiosity and with pity.

Miriam had a sound understanding, and a judgment matured beyond her years; though she admired the sincerity of her new friend,
yet

yet she could not help thinking her imprudent to make so immediate an avowal to a stranger, to one so much younger, and so unhacknied in the world; and while she felt for her apparent affliction, she saw the weakness which rendered it the constant subject of animadversion; though acknowledged as proceeding from her own misconduct, the sincerity displayed did not exculpate her; for thought Miriam, "Surely we ought to bear at least, without repining, those woes which we bring on ourselves."

Another day and night did not add to our heroine's respect for Mrs. Stafford; constant querulousness and lamentations ended every conversation;—how widely soever from the subject began, she always finished with a detail of her own unhappiness. The quick feelings which at first drew Miriam towards her,

her, were allayed by observing this; and all she could now feel for her was a kind of pity, which forcibly demonstrated that the object of it was incapable of creating respect; and thus her character more clearly developed. She found that instead of steady advice or sober admonition, she must herself solace and sooth the solitary hours of Mrs. Stafford, as her observation too plainly shewed that neither judgment nor steadiness dwelt in the breast of her new acquaintance.

Far different were the feelings with which she beheld Mrs. Fitzpatrick. Every time that she met the lively glance of that lady's eyes, her own fell in fear of the trials which might await her, in dread of the malignancy which shone triumphant there, and in horror of the principles and practices which thus disgraced the fair form of a beautiful woman.

The

The disgust, the contempt which she had, from her earliest remembrance, felt for her guardian, was now greatly increased, as she daily saw more traits of cunning, art, and meanness, and daily reflected that she was wholly in his power.

The eyes of Mortimer were often fixed on her with a meaning to which she dared not attach a name. His character, represented so dissipated, so licentious, how could she too carefully avoid him? Yet had her notions on physiognomy been taken, she would have pronounced him one of the worthiest of the group.

Alderman Caxon had but two ideas: eating and money, like Aaron's rod, had swallowed up every thing else. Miriam scorned to bestow a thought on such a contemptible character.

“ This

“ This girl seems to have acquired a few superficial accomplishments,” said Mrs. Fitzpatrick. “ I wonder you don’t send her out to India ; her inanimate face may take in some of the *golden calves* there, and make her fortune. Youth is what they covet ; if you delay, it’s too late. You must have connections there to whom you may consign her ; and by establishing her in marriage, you may get entirely rid of her, and do it with *eclat* also.”

The countenance of Fitzpatrick changed from yellow to deep orange as she spoke. He attempted several times to interrupt her ; he stammered ; he could not utter for some minutes. At length he said—“ No, Mrs. Fitzpatrick, I cannot do it ; I cannot send her to India.”

His

His whole frame underwent a perturbation, which was apparent to the discerning eyes of his Lady.

“Why not?” cried she. “What can you possibly urge that will look like an objection? I am convinced it will be the making of her.”

We are not at liberty to discover what passed in the bosom of Mr. Fitzpatrick; but his voice higher than his wife had ever heard it before, he said—“Mention this no more—never mention it again!” and with a look which spoke a final determination, he left the room.

Mrs. Fitzpatrick was astonished. She did not believe her husband had power to exert himself against any proposal of her's; and she remained behind him, to wonder at his behaviour, and to impute it to some
selfish

selfish alarm (though on what account she could not imagine), and to wish that Mr. Fitzpatrick had never felt the emotion of compassion when it induced him to protect Miriam. Yet the more she reflected on the subject, the more was she assured that his own interest, in some shape or other, had aided the charitable purpose; and that there was a mystery in the business, with which she was not to be acquainted. Her curiosity would have slept, could she have got rid of the orphan, whose animated, yet placid features, whose softness, whose grace had made her feel the dignity of nature, the inferiority of art. The adventitious charms which she had hitherto gloried in, were often humbled before the intrinsic merit which, in hiding itself, was discovered; and her breast burned with every envious feeling towards the object who had thus opened her eyes.

CHAP.

CHAP. VIII.

“ Had it been only art, your eyes

“ Would not have join’d in the disguise.”

LYTTLETON.

THE borough town of Y——, which was about ten miles distant from the castle, was the place which Mr. Fitzpatrick had resolved to be the representative of in Parliament; for the idea of an opposition, where a man of his property was concerned, was a circumstance which could never enter his head—a head which had found gold to be, through his

his journey in the world, an universal solver of difficulties, an universal friend in every undertaking. To become popular in the neighbourhood was now his earnest desire; and to become popular without lavishing too much of that gold which he prized so highly, was the next thing to be considered. He took several rides over to Y——; he employed the lawyer on a little business; he made some purchases of the clothier; he put up his horses at the inn, and ordered them corn; he went to consult the apothecary about his health, and he invited the parson to dine at the castle.

The affability, the condescension of Mr. Fitzpatrick were soon spread abroad; and when he intimated his intention of coming over with the party from the castle to the next monthly hop (which had lately been christened

christened "a Cassino" by a learned lady in *politesse*) they could no longer resist their plaudits.

Mr. Fitzpatrick proposed this to his Lady, who, delighted at the idea of obtaining notoriety in a place where she had no doubt of appearing as a prodigy, if not a celestial being, eagerly assented.

Mrs. Stafford never refused any proposal of Mr. or Mrs. Fitzpatrick's.

Alderman Caxon said he would go once, just for the humour of the thing, as he hoped they would return in time for supper.

"Yes, yes, my dear Sir; but how many days are there to this prodigious gala, Fitz?"

"The day after to-morrow," answered her husband.

"Lord bless me! I must do something, or wear something to make the natives stare.

stare. Mortimer, get all your *badinage* ready for the prim bib and apron misses. But, dear Fitzpatrick, are you sure I shan't be poisoned by my politeness? Do you think the room and the company will not be absolutely filthy?"

"Very decent people, I dare say, Mrs. Fitzpatrick—many of them people of fortune; all the neighbouring families come for many miles round."

"Well, I'll venture," said the lady, "and," pausing, "I've thought of my dress: I am sure 'twill be unique, and frighten the whole room."

"Don't you go, Miss St. Ledger?" said Mrs. Stafford.

"Yes, yes, Merry shall go," said Fitzpatrick. "Who knows, Merry, but you may get a husband?"

Mortimer turned his eyes with an expression of pity on Miriam. She blushed. Mrs. Fitzpatrick, whose acute optics saw every thing, turning up her lip, and looking at Mortimer, though answering her husband, said, in a tone of sarcasm—"A likely thing truly!"

Miriam had heard, had seen enough, during ten days passed in her society, to be no longer surprised at the manner, or hurt by the behaviour of this lady—contempt was the only feeling she felt, and she left the room.

Mrs. Fitzpatrick was shut up with her Abigail some time. On her joining the company she appeared in high spirits, and said she was absolutely enchanted with her dress. "But mind, good people," cried she, "you are not to know what it is till I am arrayed for the jubilee."

The females had no curiosity ; the gentlemen did not hear her.

The evening preceding the one destined to "the Cassino," the company were busily engaged at cards, and Miriam was woefully pondering over the fire, lost in melancholy retrospection, when a violent ringing was heard at the gate. A servant presently announced Mr. Stafford, and two gentlemen entered the room.

Mrs. Stafford rose from her seat, her eyes filled with tears. She reseated herself; she took out her handkerchief; she rose again, trembled violently, and held by the arm of her chair, as she coldly, falteringly returned the enquiry of her husband. An exclamation of surprise burst from Mrs. Fitzpatrick. "Henry," she cried, "what, you have found out your sister at last!"

"My

“ My uncle, my—my ——” answered the brother.

“ Ah ! I thought we were obliged to him for your visit ; but, Mrs. Stafford, you don’t notice my brother?—Mr. Fitzpatrick, you have not seen him before—Mr. Henry Stafford, Sir.”

Mrs. Stafford sat down ;—her cheeks grew pale ; in an instant they were suffused with the deepest crimson, as she feebly bent her head to the stiff confused bow of the brother of her friend.

“ Rather a solemn meeting for such old acquaintance, I think !” said Mrs. Fitzpatrick. “ Come, Mortimer, it’s your deal.”

Miriam, frightened at the confusion of Mrs. Stafford, and astonished at the *non-chalance* with which Mrs. Fitzpatrick received an uncle and a brother, was lost in

wonder some minutes ; when, recollecting herself, she turned her eyes to view the Honourable Mr. Stafford, who was standing near her, his nephew being turned away to receive the compliments of his brother-in-law.

Mr. Stafford was a tall, upright man, who appeared to be about sixty years of age ;—the *hauteur* marked on his countenance took off the pleasing effect of a finely formed face, and the stiffness of his manner destroyed all the grace of his majestic figure. While surveying his features, and contemplating the haughty air of his deportment, Miriam no longer wondered at the tremulous confusion of his Lady ; her wonder proceeded from another cause—“ How could she ever have become his wife ? How could the gentle, the soft Mrs. Stafford unite herself
where

where disparity of manners and opinions was as apparent as disparity of years?"

Occupied in these reflections, she perceived not that any one had approached the fire place, till casting up her eyes, they met those of another intently fixed on her's. She suddenly cast them down; she started, she trembled. "Surely," thought she. "my senses have deceived me!" She looked again—still, still the same; she beheld that stranger whom she had rescued from death, whom she had sheltered in the castle!

His surprise, his confusion seemed as great as her's. His looks told her she was not forgotten; but they also told her that he wished not to avow his knowledge of her. Lost in the inexplicability of the scene before her, Miriam's senses seemed nearly to have left her; a giddiness seized her head, a

trembling came over her limbs, and she could scarcely walk out of the room.

“How is it possible,” said Miriam, mentally, when at length she had gained her chamber, “how is it possible to reconcile this scene? And is Henry, that Henry unhappy and frantic, is he the brother of the unfeeling Mrs. Fitzpatrick? So nearly allied, is it probable that his manners have escaped the contagion of bad example? Ah yes! my heart assures me he is feeling, benevolent, and generous! My heart assures me that he would not for worlds wound the feelings or the sensibility of those dependant on him. But,” added she, after a long pause, “from whence proceeded the agitation of Mrs. Stafford at his approach? His voice seemed also to falter. I did not see his countenance.

From

From whence proceeded the never to be forgotten horror at the view of the storm, where the likeness of Henry, I vainly thought, could only be discovered by me? Ah! I have solved it all. By marrying the uncle she has ruined the nephew. She has secured the fortune which otherwise would have devolved to him, and her heart aches at her own injustice, and her regret is poignant when she beholds a youth who so well deserves all the gifts of Fortune. But could Henry feel the loss of fortune so severely? Could it put despair in his countenance, distraction in his mien? Is he then mercenary? Ah, what a thought! Surely there is no virtue left in the world; surely there is no upright heart on the earth! If the loss of fortune could affect Henry Stafford so, as to tempt him to that precipice where I

beheld him—Oh never, never is that moment to be forgotten—a moment replete with anguish, with dread ! I rescued him, rescued from the deep a mercenary selfish wretch, a wretch who dared to die, who could not outlive the loss of gold ! Horrid, infamous suggestion ! It cannot, must not be ; I'll drive it from my memory for ever !”

But not from her memory for ever, not even from her thoughts for a moment, could poor Miriam drive the idea of Henry, the avaricious Henry. When in his company, she continually watched his looks, and those of Mrs. Stafford ; when alone, she dwelt on every motion : yet her partial fancy could not exculpate him from the charge with which her judgment had arraigned him.

Perhaps never were a party assembled, whose looks and manners seemed under
greater

greater restraint. Mrs. Stafford's eyes were for ever wandering towards Henry Stafford. If they met his, they were instantly withdrawn; if her husband looked at her, her cheeks grew red; and if she caught the fierce glance of Mrs. Fitzpatrick, her downcast head, her palpable emotion, told a "trembling tale."

Often were the looks of Henry Stafford turned towards Miriam, yet as often withdrawn on reading a marked distance on her speaking countenance and voice whenever she answered an address of his.

And could this be the kind, the consoling, the pitying Miriam? Could this be the angel form who rescued him from a dreadful death—who had power, in the darkest sadness of his soul, to meliorate his grief, to reconcile him to life and to his

fellow-creatures? Yes, the same in "every feature," but cruelly changed in manner. Where was the soft pensive eye which strove to meet his, which filled with tears? Where was the touching voice "on which persuasion hung?"

A heavy languor succeeded these reflections in the mind of Henry, and vainly he strove to disguise a discontented heart.

Mrs. Fitzpatrick, who attributed his melancholy and Mrs. Stafford's confusion to the same cause, seemed exhilarated at observing it; and by remarks which appeared unintentional (though artfully planned), and by careless speeches (though well considered before uttered), she contrived to heighten painfully in both their bosoms the distress and embarrassment visible to the most common observer; and her own triumph at discovering

covering her power of affecting them, gave her a flow of spirits almost too great to be borne. Mortimer had still the greatest share of her attention; all her charms, all her attractions were levelled at him;—yet Mortimer was dispirited and absent; and vainly did Mrs. Fitzpatrick, with all her penetration, endeavour to develop the cause.

Mr. Stafford was always engaged in the contemplation of his high genealogy, or in making out the pedigrees of his acquaintance. “Who is he?” was his first question; and not having had that satisfactorily answered when he had asked it of his niece before her marriage with Mr. Fitzpatrick, very little respect or regard were demonstrated in his comportment towards the master of the house. Mr. Fitzpatrick *tout au contraire* paid him the most scrupulous attention, and

humbled himself into servility towards his uncle, the Honourable Mr. Stafford. A great portion of his respect proceeded, perhaps, from knowing it a title he could never inherit himself; perhaps also, his conscience silyly whispered that neither by thought, word, or deed had he ever deserved it.

To search into the emotions of others had never been the study of Fitzpatrick; it was a study far below the dignity of his Honourable relative, and Caxon's eyes were always fixed on his plate, except when they were closed in sleep; so that the rest of the group were left to make their observations on each other. Exultation, confusion, doubt, uncertainty, and mystery, all passed unnoticed by the three elders of the party.

CHAP. IX.

“ We cannot break one stubborn country heart ;

“ The brutes, insensible, our power defy ;

“ To love exceeds a squire’s capacity.”

LYTTLETON.

“ WE shall go in two hours, Miss St. Ledger,” said Mrs. Fitzpatrick, as they were leaving the dining-room the evening destined for their *debut* at the Y—— Casino. The Honourable Mr. Stafford looked intently at Miriam for the first time since he had been at the Castle ; but Miriam saw him not, for she was making her exit.

“ St. Ledger,” said he, pausing, after she had shut the door, “ a very good name, a very distinguished family in this county.”— (Fitzpatrick stared.)—“ I have known some branches of it, and their pedigree can be traced coeval with the Staffords I believe, which is saying a great deal Mr.—Mr.—a—Mr. Fitzpatrick,” pretending to have forgot his name.

“ I knew one Mr. St. Ledger, who was a noted man for giving good dinners ; he was a Bank Director,” said Caxon, putting a large piece of preserved ginger into his mouth.

“ That young lady is from this county of course ?” said Mr. Stafford, not attending to Caxon.

“ No, Sir, no,” answered Fitzpatrick, in some confusion ; “ the name was—was——”

“ Yes,

"Yes, it must have been originally from this county I think," continued Mr. Stafford.

"Where did she come from, Sir?"

"From India," replied Fitzpatrick, in eager trepidation, wishing for ever to get rid of the subject. "I out of charity took the care of her. Her—her real name I—I did not approve, and I gave her that of St. Ledger. She is dependant on me for every mouthful she eats."

"Indeed!" said Mr. Stafford, in a tone of surprise. "Well, see how far imagination may be carried: I thought the style of her features were vastly similar to some of the St. Ledger family, with whom I was formerly acquainted."

"I never knew that St. Ledger was the name of any family belonging to this county till now."

"It's

“It’s a sign, Sir,” answered Mr. Stafford, gravely, “that you have not searched very far into the records of the county you inhabit; ancient and honourable, the family have been for *centuries* distinguished.”

Fitzpatrick fell into a deep fit of rumination; and Mr. Stafford, perceiving he was not attended to, resumed his own dignity, and drawing from his pocket a list of the Peerage, studied it intently, while Caxon snored at his side.

Soon arrayed in modest white, with her fine hair playing negligently about her forehead, Miriam sought the drawing-room, that she might be ready to join the party. The room was empty; and she was about to retire to her apartment, when Mortimer entered. Surprised, his eye glanced round, and, approaching Miriam, he said—“I can
hardly

hardly credit my senses; are you really alone, Miss St. Ledger?"

"Not at present," answered she, carelessly.

Mortimer, smiling, attempted to speak, but his agitation was visible.—"Circumstances combine," at length he said with quickness, "to prevent me from paying that attention, that respect which I feel, which you so highly merit. Will you, amiable Miss St. Ledger, will you forgive my often seeming neglect, my rudeness, my ——"

"Oh certainly I will," cried Miriam, laughing. "I have been too long a recluse to demand those little *minutiæ* from the beaux, which I should receive with awkwardness were they offered me."

"You are all that is amiable and good," said he, with emphasis; and with great emotion

emotion he added, snatching her hand—
“ Oh that I were worthy of your friendship!
But I know, even now I feel, I am not.
Purity like your's ——”

He paused, but pressed the trembling hand he still held to his lips, when the door hastily opened. Henry Stafford appeared at it, and quitted it immediately ; while Miriam, in the deepest confusion, released her hand, and escaped by another door into the garden. The behaviour of Mortimer had distressed Miriam ; the appearance of Stafford filled her with vexatious disquiet ; the idea of his discovering her in such a *tête-à-tête* with Mortimer, gave her a pain which she sought not to analyze.

“ Oh !” thought she, “ what would I not give to be again in the lonely, the secluded state which I so languished to be relieved from !

from ! What would I not give to be at a distance from the *hauteur* of Mrs. Fitzpatrick, from the dread of Mortimer, and from the cutting coldness of Henry Stafford !”

Our heroine’s cogitations were interrupted by the appearance of a servant, who informed her that the carriages were in waiting.

The Machievalian art of Mrs. Fitzpatrick had here again its interference. She ordered what parties were to go together. In her own coach she placed herself and Mortimer, Mrs. Stafford and her nephew—an appellation which she generally gave him when talking to her timid friend. Miriam was left to the three elder gentlemen, who went in Mr. Stafford’s coach.

“ Henry, why don’t you assist your aunt ?” with a malicious smile, said Mrs. Fitzpatrick as they were getting into their carriage,

carriage, which drove up first. Stafford, the colour rising to his face, offered his arm. The trembling aunt could scarcely derive any assistance from it. Mrs. Fitzpatrick, having thus laid the basis of confusion by placing Henry opposite poor Mrs. Stafford, contrived to make her distress and embarrassment strengthen every moment by her oblique remarks.

This monthly meeting of the inhabitants of the town and vicinity of Y—— was held in the club-room of a very paltry inn, or rather alehouse; but it was the best-the place afforded, and in this sociable meeting the company derived much pleasure, and danced unmindful of the midnight hour.

The country round was barren, and not populous; many families therefore, who lived at the distance of ten miles, preferred
trotting

trotting to and from Y—— on a Cassino night, to being cut off from society for ever. Country Curates, unmindful of dirt, and intent on a dance, rode a dozen miles, carrying their wives behind them on a pillion, and cloak bags containing their apparel before them. Fat Rectors trotted more solemnly on their black steeds; jolly young fox-hunters came galloping over the moors; and the Squire's Lady, his Worship, and the little tribe came in the ponderous family coach. The court-yard of the Black Lion, nay even the Black Lion itself exhibited a scene of confusion at once entertaining and burlesque. Gentlemen were providing for their horses, and searching for their parcels. Ladies were squalling for rooms to dress in, and were wedged in twenty together to array in a small chamber,

chamber, where the only mirror to be procured, would scarcely take in the *coup d'oeil* of the countenance. Nothing was heard through the little tenement but a jargon of noises and voices. At intervals these, and such like sentences caught the ear.

“ Where is Mrs. Davis’s bandbox ? ”

“ Coming, Mem, coming.”

“ Lend Miss Wilson a comb.”

“ Bring water for Squire Watkins to shave.” And near the ladies’ dressing-room—

“ How does this look, my dear ? ”

“ Beautiful, Mrs. Smith, beautiful behind, Meth.”

“ What a sweet colour ! ”

“ Lord, cousin, I shall never be dressed if you will keep the glass so long.”

“ I

“ I can’t get my gown on ; I wish Nancy Jarvis at Jericho for making it so tight. I’ve fairly split out all the sleeve.”

“ What shall I do for powder ?”

“ Oh sister, sister, I’ve forgot my petticoat ! What shall I do ?”

In such an assembly as I have endeavoured to describe, much entertainment of course could not be derived by the party from the Castle. The two coaches followed each other so closely, that the whole party ascended the stairs at the same time ; and when they entered the ill-lighted room, where the two fiddlers were already beginning to rosin, and tune their musical Cremonas, all eyes were turned on them. Many of the company advanced to make their humble obeisance, and to introduce their wives and daughters to our important Nabob.

Important

Important indeed ! and perhaps never did he look of more consequence than now, when he paraded up this country ball-room at the side of his wife, “ who looked a Goddess, and who moved a Queen.”

This was ere the universal fashion for unpowdered locks had been adopted,—ere it had been heard of in Cornwall. A glossy black wig gave peculiar dignity to the fine formed features of Mrs. Fitzpatrick, while a robe of scarlet cloth, trimmed with sable, added majesty to a form ever graceful.

When Miriam surveyed her as she moved along, she mentally said—“ What a pity that so superior a form enshrines not a heart of more refined materials !”—Her attention was soon called off by a laugh from Mortimer, when looking for the cause, she perceived a most ludicrous figure advancing

to

to their group. A tall thin female, of a most shewy appearance, came up close to Mr. and Mrs. Fitzpatrick, and making two very low curtsies close before them, said—
“How d’ye do, Mem? How d’ye do, Sir? Welcome to our parts; I shall be happy to see you at Burtel.”

Mortimer disguised not his mirth at this speech. Mr. Fitzpatrick, never unmindful of interest, and knowing her to be the daughter of a wealthy farmer, who had great interest in the town, said—“Thank you, Miss Wilson, thank you;” while Mrs. Fitzpatrick commanded her muscles, and returned a condescending, a fascinating smile, which she well knew how to put on. Delighted at her reception, Miss Wilson went round to the rest of the party; the same deep curtsy, and the same speech of “How
VOL. I. G d’ye

d'ye do, Mem, Sir, or Miss—welcome to our parts—I shall be happy to see you at Burtel,” was continued without variation of voice, action, or manner till she came to Caxon, who, being a little deaf, thought she said—“I shall be happy to see you to eat turtle.” Quickly he answered—“With pleasure, Ma’am. Dear me, I should not have guessed it. What, have you turtles in this part of the country? They are landed at Falmouth, I suppose?”

Miss Wilson perceived not his mistake, but thought he had asked her a simple question, and answered—“Oh dear yes, Sir, plenty enough they are with us; they hatch every month almost.”

“Hatch, Ma’am! why I never heard of their breeding in England. Where, how do you keep them?—it’s very extraordinary!”

“In

“ In cages, Sir.”

“ Cages ! more surprising still.—Ma’am, if you please, I’ll come and see your’s ; for I’ll keep some myself at Islington.”

“ You’ll be kindly welcome, Sir ; our’s are to the full as large as pigeons.”

“ Madam, as large as what ?”

“ As large as pigeons, Sir.”

“ Pigeons !”

“ Yes, indeed, to the full as large as pigeons. Cousin Jenny, now ben’t our turtle-doves as big as pigeons ?”

“ Doves !” exclaimed Caxon, contemptuously ; “ I wouldn’t say thank ye for a thousand of ’em !”

Miss Wilson coloured ; but the dance beginning, she had not any more time to spare on the subject of turtle-doves. Vexed to be disappointed, Caxon, in no very plea-

fant mood, sat down. Mortimer and Henry Stafford both advanced to Miriam with precisely the same intention, *viz.* to ask her hand to go down the dance; but they were both prevented by Fitzpatrick, who at that instant led up a stiff figure, dressed in a purple coat and scarlet waistcoat, saying--“Merry, I’ve found a partner for you;” and taking her hand, without waiting for her answer, he presented it to his companion.

Heartily vexed to be condemned to dance with such an awkward, vulgar looking person, and disappointed at not hearing Stafford when an opportunity offered when they might have conversed free from interruption, and when perhaps he might have been led into an explanation of the behaviour which seemed so inexplicable, and which it was her anxious wish to have developed, she languidly

guidly followed her partner to the set of dancers; but here her ideas were soon diversified by looking at the uncouth group of mortals with whom she was to mix. Her stiff partner, after drawing on his gloves, which seemed a matter of importance, began the dance with our heroine. Never was a greater contrast exhibited; the light elasticity, the grace of Miriam, the elegance of her form, the delicacy of her motions when opposed to the stiff awkwardness of her partner, who appeared to have numbered nearly fifty years, and whose countenance and whole appearance exhibited traits of coarseness and vulgarity, was too apparent not to be perceived by the whole party from the castle.

Mrs. Fitzpatrick triumphed in the embarrassment of Miriam, and every time she

came during the dance to the part of the room where she sat, she contrived to make remarks, which she was conscious would heighten the mortification she already felt.

Mrs. Stafford regarded her with a look of commiseration. Mortimer did not appear pleased. Henry Stafford had left the room, and the Honourable Mr. Stafford could not conceal the disgust he felt at mixing with such a plebeian set. Fitzpatrick continued to bow low, and make fulsome compliments to his future constituents; and Caxon, to the great delight of three antique maidens, had sat down with them to a pool of quadrille.

Mr. Jafon endeavoured to entertain his fair partner with his remarks and questions. "So, Miss, this is the first time you've been at our Cassino? And how do you like

it,

it, Miss? Don't you think 'tis a sociable little thing? Here you see we all get together, and get as sociable as can be in a trice, though mayhap, as is the case 'twixt you and me, we have never cast eyes on one another before. Pray, Miss, will you please to take a little refreshment?"

Miriam returned thanks, but declined taking any.

"Oh for that matter I have some here," said he, putting his hand in his pocket. "This is my way: here, Miss, here's some nice rich cake; you may see 'tis rich enough by the greasiness of the paper; 'tis a little squat to be sure, for when I sat down, I sat upon my pocket; but 'tis never the worse, Miss. Pray take a bit."

Miriam again declined.

"Oh dear! here, Miss, mayhap this apple will please you? Dickens! what with the dancing,

dancing, and one thing or t'other, 'tis main hot; but never the worse for that this cold weather—is it, Miss?"

Disgusted at his vulgarity, and wearied with his teasing freedom, Miriam having gone down two dances, complained of fatigue, and retired to a seat at a distance from her party, fearing that if Mr. Fitzpatrick saw her unemployed, he would again force her to dance with Jason. Luckily, however, that gentleman now espied a lady enter the room, whom he immediately recognized as a very old acquaintance; and he walked off in a hurry to make her an offer of his hand, his rich cake, and his hot apple. Delighted to be relieved from his conversation, Miriam only waited to see him stand up with his new partner, that she might again join Mrs. Stafford; but while sitting
alone,

“ Miss St. Ledger sitting at a distance from her party, with that air of care on her countenance ! Oh suffer me to enquire the cause ! But there is another cause which I must search for—the cause of her averted looks, her constrained manner. Ah ! should I ever know, should I ever be able to discover (was it possible an instant to forget that face, that form ?) in the Miriam I now see, that Miriam, who in the bitterest hour of agony soothed a despairing maniac into reason—that hour, that night, that blessed night is never, never to be forgotten. Then why, Oh ! why, cruel Miss St. Ledger ! why do you wear that air of coldness, that distance ? I know your situation : I feel for, I compassionate you : I would yield up my

G 5

existence

existence to contribute to the happiness of your's ! But it is not the embarrassment of your situation that thus freezes your looks : Oh ! they are not thus cold towards all—to Mortimer, the happy Mortimer !”

His voice grew animated at the latter part of his speech. The spirit of our heroine rose indignant against him ; and turning to him with an air of severe calmness, she said—
“ Mr. Stafford, to what purpose is this harangue ? Do you mean it to conciliate my esteem ? Ah ! how wide is it from producing that effect !”

She was rising, when Stafford said—“ Oh one instant I conjure, Miss St. Ledger, one instant longer ! Deign to explain from whence proceeds the inexplicability of your conduct !”

“ Rather let me ask you that question ; ask why your pretended ignorance of the
house

ouse belonging to the husband of your
sister—ask whence your agitation, your
——”

“My what!” said Stafford, impetuously. “Oh Miriam! dearest Miriam! let me hear you out. Oh may I exculpate myself from every charge as easily as I have it in my power from the first you bring against me. Go on—say what you allude to.”

“ I had forgot,” said Miriam, colouring, “ that I have no interest in your conduct ; however inconsistent, however altered, the inconsistency, the alteration cannot affect me.”

“ No, Madam,” said Stafford, “ I have not the temerity to suppose it could ; but yet, when I see your looks of contempt, when I hear your studied speeches, I ——”

“ Dear me, Miss !” said Miss Wilson, who now interrupted the *tête-à-tête*, neither to the

G 6

satisfaction

fatisfaction of the gentleman or the lady, though Miriam vainly endeavoured to persuade herself that it was well-timed, "here's a sad to do ! Dear Miss, what's your name ? What will poor Miss Parker do ? she has lost her tail !"

"Ma'am ?" said Miriam, in a voice of astonishment, while Stafford's eyes were fixed on her with a stare of disgust and aversion, which he could not conceal.

"Have you seen it, Sir ?" said she, turning her discourse to him. "Poor Miss Parker will be half ruined ; 'twas exactly the colour of her own hair, and the barber charged her seven and sixpence for it not above eight months ago. I think she forgot to put it on ; but she says she felt it hanging upon her back when she danced down the first dance."

Miriam

Miriam glanced her eye, with an expression of disgust, from Miss Wilson to Stafford; and he having told the fair enquirer that he knew nothing of the lady's loss, turned to Miriam, and said—"Will you join your party? Our conversation is of course prevented for the present. I would, if I dared, say how I lament it: I would also add my strong disapprobation of my wife brother's conduct. How could he ever think of introducing into such an assemblage of vulgarity as is here presented to the view—how could he ever think of bringing women of elegant minds to blend with so vile a group? My sister is volatile, is thoughtless: I would interest her for you, but that I have no power over her. Separated early in life, our pursuits, our sentiments have always been widely different. But why do I still
address

address you? Even now I force your attention. Pardon me, Miss St. Ledger, I will not again offend. To Mortimer, perhaps, your attention would not be constrained; I leave you to him."

As he said this, they approached the place where sat Mrs. Fitzpatrick, Mrs. Stafford, and Mortimer. Henry Stafford strolled slowly to another part of the room, and Miriam, perceiving a seat vacant next Mrs. Stafford, sat down by her; but the absent, the embarrassed air which was evident in that lady, afforded her a new subject for reflection, as she even thought there was a coldness in her manner towards her.

"Alas!" thought Miriam, "it is vain for me to attempt searching into the intricacies of the human heart. Is there not one being who acts uniformly, or is this waywardness

wardness, this contradiction alike inherited by all? Oh Stafford! at once the most versatile and the most interesting of human beings, why cannot you at least be consistent? But why, why weary myself with fruitless conjectures?" And she walked to a card table, where for some time had been stationed the Honourable Mr. Stafford; and putting a chair by him, she looked over his cards.

There was a stern, an inflexible principle in the manners and sentiments of this gentleman which had conciliated the respect of our young heroine. She saw the pride, the foolish fondness for family which was his ruling passion; but she discerned numerous traits of grandeur in his opinions, which convinced her that, though obscured by clouds of failing, his heart was as noble as his rank.

Mr.

Mr. Stafford, enveloped in his own importance, acting and thinking for himself alone, never bestowed a thought on those around him ; he never sought to penetrate into the feelings of others ; but immersed in study and reflection, while treated with proper respect, he cared not for any thing else. The fear which his presence always infused into the breast of his wife, filled him with satisfaction, as he attributed her manner to veneration, and a proper sense of his dignity ; hence his behaviour to her was marked by the most punctilious politeness.

Mr. Stafford had soon decided the rub-ber. When he had ended it, he placed himself by the side of the lady who had been his partner, saying—" I consider myself fortunate in again having had the pleasure of meeting you, Madam. The contour of
your

your face immediately struck me : I recognized a countenance seen long since, and the days of my youth started afresh to my memory."

" You were very good, Sir," replied the lady, " to avow yourself an old acquaintance. I fear my memory would have been treacherous, had not you kindly helped it ; but this was so unlikely a place to meet Mr. Stafford in," lowering her voice, " that I could scarcely credit my senses even when you acknowledged yourself. But will you not introduce me to your Lady, and also to that young lady who has found you out?"

" You do Mrs. Stafford honour, Madam. She will be proud of the acquaintance of Mrs. Lester. This is a ward I understand of Mr. Fitzpatrick's," as he turned to Miriam ; " a Miss St. Ledger, Madam."

Miriam

Miriam got up, surprised and pleased at the notice of Mrs. Lester, who, extending her hand towards her, said—"The countenance of Miss St. Ledger tells me she is worthy of the name she bears."

Mr. Stafford walked solemnly to Mrs. Stafford, and as he was bringing her up to Mrs. Lester, that lady said to Miriam—"I shall claim kindred with you: I also was a St. Ledger."

Miriam answered her new acquaintance with grateful warmth, and the timid, pale form of Mrs. Stafford then approached, and received those compliments without emotion, which had excited such a pleasing tumult in the mind of the animated Miriam.

Mrs. Lester was a tall, elegantly formed woman. Her countenance was pale, her features expressive, and her manner interesting.

She

She was about fifty years of age ; she had been early left a widow with an affluent fortune ; she had no children ; and her wishes being limited to the country, she had not visited the metropolis since her widowhood. Not that she had secluded herself from society ; she visited all the families within fifteen miles of Menrooth, and by frequenting their little parties, by her affability, condescension, and real goodness of heart, she was universally beloved, courted, and respected.

“ Our’s is really a brilliant Cassino to-night,” said Mrs. Lester to Mrs. Stafford. “ I am sure we ought to consider ourselves much honoured by such a reinforcement from the castle. I meant to have paid my respects to Mrs. Fitzpatrick the first opportunity. I shall now have an additional inducement, as I find she is the niece of Mr. Stafford.”

Mr.

Mr. and Mrs. Fitzpatrick were now introduced in form to Mrs. Lester by their honourable relative. Mrs. Fitzpatrick paid her compliments with the most fascinating sweetness, and Fitzpatrick bowed low to Mrs. Lester, having seen enough of her large estate to form an estimate of the respect she was entitled to from him. He apologized for not having spoken to her before, but protested he did not know she was in the room. His apology was easily accepted. Mrs. Lester might easily be overlooked, from her always contriving to place herself in the least conspicuous part of a room.

As Fitzpatrick stood by Miriam, Jason came up to them, and said, with an air of profound respect—"I assure you, Sir, 'twas not my fault that we gave over so soon; for I would have had Miss continue, but she said

said she was tired, and so I could not press her when she said she was tired ; but if she comes to the Casino next time, I hope she'll hold out longer, and dance with me again. I shall be very happy indeed, Miss."

" Thank you, Mr. Jason, thank you," said Fitzpatrick. " Merry is much obliged to you. She'll be happy enough to dance with you—won't you, my girl ? Why don't you speak ? What, are you shy ? Well, never mind—all in good time."

" Miss, I wish you a very good night," said Jason, bowing very low before Miriam.

" I must be undressing, that I may get home betimes ; for early to bed, and early to rise, is the way to grow healthy, and wealthy, and wise, you know, Miss."

Miriam could scarcely refrain from laughing, yet felt very much relieved at his taking leave.

leave. Mrs. Fitzpatrick now expressed great weariness, and desired that the coaches might be ordered. Never was a town-bred *belle* more mortified than had been this lady during the whole evening. She counted on transfixing at least half a dozen hearts ; but, to her disappointment, saw not a single one worth aiming at. Most of the beaux at the Y—— Caffino were married men, who, content with their wives and their smiling progeny, confined their wishes to their own fire-sides, and who, bringing their families to partake amusement at the same time, and in the same place with themselves, contrived to keep their party about them, and to be at home in an assembly-room.

The gentlemen who were introduced to Mrs. Fitzpatrick, made their respectful bows, hoped they saw her in health, hoped
that

that she liked Cornwall, and turned off to lead out their partners. Some of the younger and more conceited part of the company would have liked to have boasted of their intimacy with so fine a woman, but that they had not courage to begin a conversation; and thus, though the wives stared at her dress, though the Misses envied, though the old maids condemned it, though she was conscious of engrossing the whole attention of the females, yet, as she had no new flirt with which to console herself for the dulness and insipidity of Mortimer, which she had brooded on the whole evening, she was heartily tired of the Cassino, sick of herself, and out of humour with the whole world;—yet had she the consummate art to preserve the outward semblance of perfect good humour; and she applied with such a sweetness of voice to
know

know if Mrs. Stafford would like to go, for that she felt tired, and paid her compliments with such a fascinating grace to Mrs. Lester, lamenting the indisposition which obliged her to quit such pleasing society so early in the evening, that every one united in pronouncing her one of the most amiable and interesting of women; and she walked gracefully out of the room, followed by the low bows of the men, the deep curtsies of the women, and the thousand good nights of Miss Wilson. Mrs. Stafford followed; her brow was unusually clouded, and her mind was ill at ease: and, not having the dissimulation of her friend, she could not conceal that she was as little at peace with the world as with herself. Caxon half asleep, Fitzpatrick shaking hands on each side as he passed, and Mr. Stafford majestically followed the ladies down stairs.

stairs. Henry Stafford and Mortimer both approached to offer Miriam assistance; but, perceiving their intention, she eluded them, and got unassisted into the coach, where her three former companions were already seated, and they soon reached the castle. Tired of the scenes she had been engaged in, and longing for an hour of silent retrospection, Miriam sent her excuses to Mrs. Fitzpatrick, and immediately retired for the night.

CHAP. X.

“ For wit, like wine, intoxicates the brain,
“ Too strong for feeble women to sustain.”

LYTTLETON.

IN the solitude of her chamber Miriam reflected on the events of the past day. She retraced all the incidents which one by one had contributed to render her present feelings so distressing. The behaviour of Mortimer, his energetic manner, the unfortunate appearance of Stafford at such a moment, his succeeding

succeeding conversation, his wild, his reproachful accents—reproachful even while his own conduct still wore an appearance of the darkest mystery; Mrs. Stafford's pointed coldness, which had wounded her to the quick—all conspired to keep her mind in a state of tumult too impetuous for repose. Retrospection was painful, anticipation presented not one brightening gleam. Still did days of dependance, of endurance cloud the perspective—still was she doomed to hear the meanness of Fitzpatrick, the acrimonious taunts, the unfeeling malevolence of his wife, to receive insults with patient silence, and be cruelly wounded at the default of those, whom she once thought worthy of her esteem.

“Ah, Mrs. Lester!” thought she, “had it been my happy lot to have been left
H 2 dependant

dependant on your bounty, how different then would have been my situation! Your looks assure me that from you I never should have borne those insults, which so wound the heart of poverty. Ah! dare I say so, dare I ever attempt again to read the human heart from countenance or manner? I that have been so flagrantly deceived—I who thought sincerity marked on the features of Stafford, when suffering, sinking with misfortune, he came before me—I who thought kindness of heart and suavity of disposition were unalloyed in Mrs. Stafford!”

Uneasy, and deeply revolving the past, the present, and the future, without being able to alter her situation, or console herself with the idea of seeing a period to her present difficulties, the morning dawned on the wakeful Miriam just as she had resolved

to

to avoid alike both Mortimer and Stafford. The former she had heard was profligate—she saw him the almost avowed admirer of a married woman ;—the latter she feared as the most insidious, the most artful of men, who could assume any shape to deceive, and adopt the most interesting manners, the most specious allurements when it suited his policy. Yet Miriam sighed as she made this resolve, and blushed as she acknowledged to herself the pleasure which would be her's, were it possible for his character, his mysterious behaviour to be cleared up with honour to himself.—“ But, alas !” cried she, putting her hands before her eyes, as if to drive his image from before them, “ it cannot be so cleared up : I fear there is a dark, a guilty cause for Mrs. Stafford's downcast looks, for his perturbed, his agitated manner. But

Oh righteous Heaven ! let me not judge him wrongly ; crush these ideas in my breast if they injure him ; for Oh ! were they proved, were I convinced of the depravity I fear, were I certain that he nourished a passion for the wife of his uncle — I cannot bear the thought. And how, where in such a case could the wretched Miriam fly ? Where guilt surrounded me, how could I escape contamination ? But let me not give way to these suspicions—let me dismiss them from my heart ; for ah ! they rankle there, and bear me from repose !”

“ I must beg, dear Fitzpatrick,” said his Lady at breakfast, “ that you will not press me into any more of your Cassino parties. Upon my honour the savages exceeded every thing that I could have formed an idea of ; their vulgarity was immense.”

“ I

“ I am sorry you were not entertained, Mrs. Fitzpatrick ; but you know sometimes we are obliged —— ”

“ Aye, aye, I know what you mean ; but Mrs. Stafford looks quite in the dumps after it ; and as to you, Henry, you are the ghost of your former self. Mortimer was the only person who seemed to enter into the spirit of it, except you, Miss St. Ledger. I declare I had almost forgotten how gaily you danced away with your smart partner.”

“ Yes, yes, Merry was pretty well off,” said Fitzpatrick. “ Mr. Jason is a rich bachelor ; and if you play your cards well, child, who knows but he may make you an offer.”

“ I beg, Sir,” cried Miriam, now roused beyond her usual endurance, “ that you will desist.”

“What, you don’t like to have it talked of.”

Mrs. Fitzpatrick, having disconcerted our heroine, now turned to Mrs. Stafford, saying, “Nay, but you don’t answer me, Mrs. Stafford. Now is Henry a bit like what he used to be when you and I ——”

“I don’t know indeed,” quickly, though hesitatingly, answered Mrs. Stafford; but, as if exerting all her resolution, she immediately added—“I have not noticed him;” though her downcast eyes plainly shewed the untruth she was telling.”

“Now, dear Stafford, don’t say so. Last night I am sure your eyes were never taken from him.”

Mrs. Stafford was now effectually silenced. Henry Stafford seemed to participate in her confusion; but attempting an unembarrassed air, he said—“My sister has not forgot her old

old mode of raising the vanity of her brother ; but you forget, Louisa, I am somewhat older than I was at that period when you found me so apt a scholar."

The entrance of the Honourable Mr. Stafford now turned the conversation; for even Mrs. Fitzpatrick felt a little restrained in his presence. The respect and attention of Henry Stafford towards his uncle were apparent to the most common observer. Miriam would have admired his behaviour, could she have divested herself of the idea that it was assumed to cover his own purposes ; and seen through that medium, her disgust took place of admiration.

" That Mrs. Lester was a pretty genteel woman," said Fitzpatrick, turning to Mr. Stafford. " She has a large fortune, Sir. Her estate, I believe, is computed at three thousand a year."

"She is of the family I mentioned to you yesterday, Sir," answered Mr. Stafford.

"What family? I don't recollect what you mean," rejoined Fitzpatrick, whose memory however was soon brushed up when Mr. Stafford answered—"The St. Ledgers. Mrs. Lester was a St. Ledger. I knew her brother intimately in the early part of my life, and through him was introduced to this lady. I possess rather a singular faculty: I never forget a countenance which I have once seen, and the moment I approached the seat where Mrs. Lester sat, I acknowledged her for an old acquaintance. Nothing but my having known her would have tempted me to have played amongst so plebeian a set. Mrs. Lester is just the same affable woman that she was a girl; her only failing, that which in youth obscured

her shining character, seems to have gathered strength with years—I mean her easiness of access, her aptness to forget the family she sprang from, the name she bore, and to treat those as her equals who ought not to be so distinguished; but in a female it is more excusable than in one of our sex. How, if we repress not the approaches of the vulgar, shall we draw the line betwixt the ancient English gentleman and the upstart?”—Then, as if recollecting himself, by glancing his eye at the same moment on Fitzpatrick and Caxon, Mr. Stafford stopped abruptly; he might have proceeded for an hour without interruption from Mr. Fitzpatrick. The name of St. Ledger, when applied to any other than his *protégée*, seemed to have the power of shaking his whole nervous system. He now indulged in sullen
H 6
silence,

silence, and soon after breakfast quitted the room.

Mrs. Stafford continued to wear that air of cold reserve, which had at first so wounded the sensibility of Miriam; but feeling conscious of her purity, and uprightness of intention, she resolved to think no more of her capricious behaviour. A week passed on with little variety, little entertainment, and little content to our heroine. Mrs. Lester had paid a morning visit at the Castle. Miriam happened to be in her apartment, and was not thought of sufficient consequence to be called down. Mrs. Fitzpatrick took Mrs. Stafford to return it in two days after, without mentioning her intention to Miriam, who felt real mortification from her exclusion, as her most anxious and sanguine wish, since her meeting at the Y—

Cassino,

Cassino, had been to see more of this lady.— At length a time was fixed when Miriam hoped to be gratified. Mrs. Lester had appointed a day for dining at the Castle ; a large party of the neighbourhood was also invited : but how great was the disappointment which she again experienced, when she was told that a servant had arrived to inform Mrs. Fitzpatrick that a sudden and serious indisposition would prevent Mrs. Lester from paying her intended visit.

Miriam could not hear this without feeling it most acutely ; and she languidly awaited the arrival of the vulgar party, without bestowing a thought on one individual who was to compose it.

Miss Wilson and Mr. Jason formed two of the most prominent characters in this group, and Mrs. Fitzpatrick selected them for her entertainment ;

entertainment; and placing Mortimer at her right-hand at table (being in thorough good humour with him, as his attention had been increasing since the Cassino night), she contrived to draw out their characters for his amusement. Her wit always keen, her satire always pointed, seemed to have acquired new force and poignancy; and her sallies were so pleasantly timed, and so literally understood, and received by the objects of her ridicule, that the taciturnity, the gravity of the Honourable Mr. Stafford, more than once relaxed into a smile. Henry Stafford, though frequently a sufferer from this mischievous talent of his sister, was yet roused from brooding over his thoughts by her sprightliness. Mrs. Stafford looked as if she felt it (a thing very unusual with her), and Mortimer laughed unceasingly; but

Miriam,

Miriam, poor Miriam could not be gay—she could not forget the absence of Mrs. Lester; and provoked that on her alone she had no power, and wanting universal applause, Mrs. Fitzpatrick resolved to wreak her revenge on her, by bringing her also on the foreground as an object of ridicule.

When the gentlemen came to the tea-table, Mrs. Fitzpatrick went up to Jason, and whispering him, was answered loud enough to be heard by the company—"I would indeed, Mem; I would with all the pleasure in the world, but that I fear I shall not come off to Miss's satisfaction."

"Oh never fear; I am sure in every thing you undertake, you acquit yourself most admirably. Here, Miriam, come here, child; stand up and dance a minuet with Mr. Jason."

"Indeed,

"Indeed, Madam, you must excuse me."

"Poh, poh, we can't! Fitzpatrick, come, exert your authority with your ward. Come, Mortimer, get your violin, and play them a minuet."

Mortimer obeyed, and was taking out his violin, when Jason rose up, saying—"He must just step out to fetch his hat and gloves," and quitted the room.

Miriam turned, with a beseeching look, to Mrs. Fitzpatrick.

"Lord, child, what a fuss you make!"

"Fie, fie, Merry, fie!" said Fitzpatrick.

"Is this your gratitude?"

The tears rushed into the eyes of Miriam.

"Pray, sister," said Henry Stafford, with warmth, "do not thus distress Miss St. Ledger!"

Miriam looked at him gratefully; but Mrs. Stafford, the meek Mrs. Stafford, now interposed,

interposed, saying—"Dear! there is a vast fuss made about dancing a minuet I think!"

Jason then coming in, Mrs. Fitzpatrick led Miriam to him, and bade Mortimer begin. Never was a more burlesque, a more ludicrous scene witnessed. Jason had never learned to dance, had scarcely ever seen a minuet danced in his life; but not liking to avow his ignorance, and not daring to disobey the Squire's Lady, he began.—Having heard that a hat was an indispensable requisite, he thought that he must of course wear it the whole time; and in his hurry he had put the hind part before of his large full-cocked hat. His only step consisted of placing both heels together, and then wheeling one foot, and then the other with surprising velocity; but bringing the heels together again at the end of each foot's circuit,

circuit, he moved very slowly from the spot where he first set out. Miriam made several attempts to sit down, but Mr. Fitzpatrick prevented her; she could not, however, join in the reiterated bursts of laughter, which came from all quarters of the room. Mrs. Fitzpatrick said something to Mortimer, who immediately went from a slow minuet into a quick jig; but the step, the motion of Jason were unaltered, and after some time having wheeled round the room, and again gained his starting-place, he made a low bow to the company without noticing his partner (whom he had left at the opposite side), and without minding the tune, which was going on merrily, and taking off his hat, and folding up his gloves, he sat himself down in his former seat."

"Come

“ Come now, Mr. Jason, you must gratify us once again by accompanying Miss St. Ledger in this beautiful duet of Jackson’s — “ Love in thine eyes.”

“ Sister ! sister !” said Henry Stafford. It was to no purpose that Jason protested he could not sing, that Miriam entreated to be excused. Mrs. Fitzpatrick would not be denied. She pulled Miriam to the pianoforte ; she gave Jason the words, and, without having ever seen the song, without having heard the words, without knowing a note of music, in a voice hoarser and more discordant than a raven’s, he sang through and through to a tune composed as he went on, without stopping for symphony, rest, or pause, the words of Jackson’s beautiful Canzonetta. It was the first time Henry Stafford had ever heard the voice of Miriam ;
and

and now unable to contain his disapprobation of his sister's conduct at thus contriving to raise a laugh where an object was concerned who excelled her in almost every thing, he abruptly left the room, unseen but by Mrs. Stafford.

Resolved that this should be the last exhibition with which she would amuse the company, Miriam, while Jason was receiving their thanks, stole softly out of the room.

“ Ah !” thought she, “ is not this a false shame to which I am giving way ? Would not my dear, my honoured Governess have condemned the proud emotions which now swell in my bursting heart ?”

These reflections crossed the upright mind of Miriam as she was going to her apartment ; but as she passed the gallery, a sudden wind from one of the open doors, which
led

led to a long range of chambers, extinguished her light, and she was obliged to retrace her steps till she reached the hall; when seeing a light emitted from the dining-room, and concluding it to be the servants preparing for supper, she went in to relight her extinguished taper;—there by the fire, leaning on the mantle-piece, with his hands enfolding his head, stood Henry Stafford. He started at hearing a step; he turned round; his eyes caught those of Miriam, and he moved towards her.—“Oh that I had the meek forbearance, the magnanimity of Miss St. Ledger!” cried he. “All the stormy passions are lulled into oblivious repose in your breast—in mine they rage without controul. Oh Miriam! pity those emotions which you cannot comprehend.”

Miriam,

Miriam, who had at first felt gratified at his address, and whose expressive countenance shewed that she was so, now imagining that he alluded to his unconquered prepossession for Mrs. Stafford, or his disappointment at seeing another share his uncle's fortune, answered with some spirit and acrimony--

“The conquest of the passions, and the government of the heart, have been thought a task worthy of the labours of the most eminent characters. Could Mr. Stafford resolutely resolve on attempting it, I think he would soon reap the fruits of the undertaking.”

She then, taking her candle as she spoke, was leaving the room, when Stafford eagerly caught her hand, saying—“Assist me in the task, for Oh! I feel it hard.”

“Hard

“ Hard indeed is it,” cried Miriam, “ for those who have long yielded to the dictates of selfish feelings alone—hard is it for those to restrain propensities which they have cherished in their hearts ; but of how little avail is my advice !”

Again was Miriam going, again was she withheld by Stafford, who said, catching her gown—“ Ah ! if you knew the effect your words have here,” laying his hand on his heart ; “ if you——” At that moment Mrs. Stafford interrupted them ; pale, agitated, and trembling, she could hardly articulate ; she ventured not to glance a look at either Miriam or Stafford, but said, in a hurried manner—“ I came to ask you to go with me up stairs, Miss St. Ledger : I am much indisposed, and cannot longer continue with the company in the other room.” Then
taking

taking the arm of Miriam, who, conscious of her own rectitude of intention, was the most assured of the trio, she led her up stairs. Silent, dejected, with her head bent to the ground, Mrs. Stafford continued for some minutes after she had been seated in her chamber. At length a loud hysterical sob forced its way, and in sighs and tears she eased her labouring soul.

Pitying her agitation and emotion, and wishing if possible to remove it, Miriam in a moment forgot all her recent cool, sullen, and inexplicable conduct towards herself; and approaching, tried to sooth her, asked, in the gentlest voice, what she should do for her, applied volatiles to her temples, and sat down by her with an air of the most patient concern, shewing by her conduct that true charity which can forget injuries, and at the same moment forgive the injurer.

“ Talk

“Talk not to me, Miss St. Ledger,” cried the sobbing Mrs. Stafford; “waste not your time on the most miserable, the most wretched of women!”

“Oh! say not so, my dear Madam,” hastily exclaimed Miriam; “thousands in this world would at this moment lay down their sorrows (if it were possible) to bear your’s. I know not the cause of your grief, but surely you possess a thousand blessings—youth, fortune, and health, three great requisites even in the estimation of the world—a husband noble——”

“Oh! say no more, Miss St. Ledger; you are an able reasoner, but I cannot hear reason: I have that gnawing here which for ever will rob me of rest. I nurse in this bosom the dangerous enemy of its peace, that which brings with it a thousand con-

comitant evils, which all struggle together, and almost break my heart."

"But why cherish reflections that thus destroy repose? Why not resolutely resolve to break from their bondage for ever?"

"Because they are alike the sweeteners and the destroyers of my existence; because the hour, in which I once lost sight of them, teemed with all the pangs I have since known. I would, but I cannot, I dare not explain myself to you. You would in an instant behold the weakness of my heart—a weakness which I shall never conquer; for Oh! each hour of my life I feel it augmented."—Then, after some moments of sullen despondency, Mrs. Stafford said, in a louder and harsher tone of voice—"But why do I keep you here? I broke off, I unfortunately interrupted your pleasant *tête-à-tête* with Henry Stafford."

Stafford. I am sure he will not forgive me, and you must susceptibly feel the difference between my conversation and his."

For a moment the cheek of Miriam was flushed; but recovering herself, and feeling indignant at the low kind of pique which was evident in Mrs. Stafford's manner, she answered—" Mine, Madam, was not a *tête-à-tête* conversation with Mr. Stafford: I was quitting the room at the moment you entered. It is as probable that he is still in the dining-room as it is that I shall go there to seek him; but as my presence is no longer pleasant to you, I will retire: and I hope when I see you again, that I shall see you in a more composed state of mind."

Mrs. Stafford's countenance varied as Miriam spoke; but as she was quitting her, she caught her hand, saying—" Ah! dear

Miss St. Ledger, candid and innocent Miriam, pity and forgive me !”

Amazed at the repeated inconsistencies of Mrs. Stafford's manner, Miriam continued to meditate on it long after she had quitted her. She had resolved on not returning to the company that night ; and another day closed over the aching head of our poor heroine, while doubts, and fears, and presentiments of evil continued to increase in her agitated mind.

CHAP. XI.

"A fever came, and from her bosom fore'd the plaintive tale."

SHENSTONE.

MR. JASON was almost a constant visiter at the Castle; his chair was always placed next that of Miriam, and the winks of her guardian, and the speeches and allusions of Mrs. Fitzpatrick convinced her that it was their intention to have it believed that he was really a suitor to her. Mrs. Fitzpatrick, by frequent remarks, implied that he was a

13 received

received one; and without having heard a word of his passion, without having spoken to the man, except by a single monosyllable, or to answer any common question, she found he was considered decidedly as her admirer by the whole household at the Castle. Though this might have afforded her little concern, as she felt assured he never could be an accepted one, yet when obliged to sit at table by his side, when obliged to hear his vulgar conversation—to see the looks of Henry Stafford often turned towards her with an air of melancholy enquiry, while those of Mortimer plainly evinced his disgust at Jason—to see the Honourable Mr. Stafford bearing his society only because he understood that he was the destined husband of Mr. Fitzpatrick's ward—to see all these things, and to be unable to confute them
without

without appearing vain and conceited, as the subject had never been mentioned by any one seriously to her, but only hinted at when the whole party were together—all this contributed, with the anxieties before mentioned, to rob her of appetite, of sleep, and of every comfort. Her cheek grew pale, her eyes were heavy and languid, her whole frame was enfeebled, her mind, as well as body, was weakened and enervated; she seemed to have lost the power of thinking, as well as acting; no longer did the bright smile play over her countenance at hearing a lively speech, or a humorous anecdote; no longer did the flush of conscious rectitude warm her cheek at receiving the unmerited insult of Mrs. Fitzpatrick; insensible to every thing around her, she sat unheeding alike their gaieties, their sarcasms, or their civilities, lost

almost to the common forms of society.— But from this dangerous state of supineness our poor heroine was soon roused—roused to feel, with renovated acuteness, the thickening evils which awaited her.

Mr. Fitzpatrick one morning sent to request her presence in his study ;—a dagger seemed to stab her to the heart at receiving the message ; but trembling, pale, with faltering steps, she obeyed.

Mr. Jason had early in youth officiated as writer to a country attorney. Having art enough to please his master, who was an old bachelor, he soon became a great favourite, and at his death he fortunately was made steward to two or three gentlemen, of whose estates in Cornwall his master had before taken care of ; and as these gentlemen resided at a distance, and never came into the county,

county, Mr. Jason was the ostensible man, and of course had the interest of the tenants. Mr. Fitzpatrick well knew how substantial an ally he would be to him, and made it his first business to gain him over. This he soon appeared to have done; and after Jason's introduction to Miriam, hearing him say he thought young Miss was very pretty, and seemed very good-tempered, Fitzpatrick, who longed for nothing so much as getting rid for ever of young Miss, formed the noble resolution of offering her to Jason with five hundred pounds, provided he ensured him all his interest. The offer was readily accepted. Five hundred pounds, and to be the husband of Mr. Fitzpatrick's ward, was a proposal teeming with advantages; and Miriam had been summoned by her guardian to be made acquainted with the good fortune that awaited

her. Mr. and Mrs. Fitzpatrick were waiting her appearance. Miriam could scarcely approach them, so much had the dread of what she was to hear intimidated her. Mrs. Fitzpatrick, seeing her distress, bade her sit down.—“Aye, do, Merry, do, and hear what I have to tell you.”

Fitzpatrick had been studying his opening speech the whole morning, and he now, with great affected solemnity taking her hand, began.—“My dear Merry, you know the kindness I’ve ever treated you with, the care I’ve taken of you ever since you were a little thing; you know that you were taken by me merely on charitable motives.”

“I have heard it often!” sighed out Miriam in a low voice. He continued—

“Many people wondered at my behaviour; but I resolved, though you were not related

to

to me, to maintain you. I gave you a good education, for my sister——”

“ Was the most worthy of women,” cried Miriam, emphatically.

“ She was a very good woman, a very good woman ; but, however, that’s neither here nor there : I am now coming to the point—a good husband, and a good comfortable settlement in life, is the first thing for a young woman to think of ; and if she does not think of it herself, it is the kindest part of her friends to think of, and to settle it for her. Now Mrs. Fitzpatrick, she knows the pains I have been taking in this respect for you ; and my friend Mr. Jason, will, I am sure, make you a very good and very comfortable husband ; for he seems mighty good-natured, and to be a sober, quiet man. He is not one of your wilhy-

washy, fine bucks—he's a good sober country gentleman ; he has got a pretty little house in Y—— tidily furnished ; and I have promised to give you five hundred pounds the day that you become his wife, which we have fixed for this day fortnight."

" Sir !" cried Miriam, rising from her seat, her heart beating as if it would burst her side, " is it possible you can be serious?"

" To be sure, to be sure ! What, you are so overjoyed I warrant, that you can't credit it."

" Overjoyed !" said Miriam ; " Oh good Heavens ! when shall I have cause to be overjoyed ? Mrs. Fitzpatrick, pray look at me, pray tell me that my senses have deceived me, or that my guardian trifles with my feelings."

" You

"You trifle with his, I think," said Mrs. Fitzpatrick; "but you will soon see the comfort which Mr. Fitzpatrick has kindly been procuring you."

"Good God!" said Miriam, "is it possible that a woman, with elegant ideas like your's, can for a moment suppose that I can experience comfort in such a situation? Ah! Madam, you jest."

"No, on my honour, child; my elegant ideas would give way when an opportunity offered for embracing independence; indeed they did," said she, lowering her voice, and glancing at Mr. Fitzpatrick.

"What is all this, what is all this? Why, Merry, why, child, you can't be serious! No, no, you can't, you can't. Here, look here, I will give you this ten pound bill to buy wedding clothes. You can get every thing you like at Y——."

"Oh.

“ Oh Sir !” cried the sobbing Miriam, “ keep your bill ; for, alas ! I can never be the wife of Jason.”

“ Never be his wife—fine words truly ! Here, here, take your bill ; look it over and over. Take it I say,” in a voice which said, “ I will be obeyed.”

Miriam tremblingly held it in her hand.

“ Put it in your pocket I say. What a fuss is here ! Is this your gratitude ? Do you forget who keeps you from starving ?”

“ No,” cried Miriam, with spirit, “ that is impossible ; but would it not have been better to have let me perish in infancy ere I had awakened to reason or reflection, than thus to condemn me to endless misery ?”

“ Put that bill in your pocket, Miss Ingratitude,” cried Fitzpatrick, storming with passion, “ and dare to say another word

word to me ! Get yourself ready and willing this very day fortnight to become Mrs. Jason. Not a word more, but dare to disobey me !” and he left the room. His Lady was following.

“ Oh Madam, hear, in pity hear me !” cried Miriam, falling on her knees.

“ No, on my word, I cannot talk to a romantic girl, headstrong and self-willed, blind to her own interest ; so good by till you are come to your reason, at least till you have a lucid interval ; but, for God’s sake, don’t come with your tragedy countenance at dinner, unless indeed you have a mind to interest Mortimer and my brother for your hapless fate ; they will help you to forget your cruel fortune I dare say,” and with great *sang froid* Mrs. Fitzpatrick then made her exit.

Miriam.

Miriam could scarcely creep up stairs; but having reached her room, she gave way to all the anguish of her soul:—not a gleam appeared to cheer or to afford her one hope of a change in her situation; and she threw herself on her bed in a state of acute sorrow, which so indisposed her already ailing frame, that she could not move from her chamber; and when a servant informed her that dinner was served, she sent word that she was indisposed, and could not come down, but desired that Joanna might be sent to her. That faithful creature, her only friend in the large family, no sooner felt her burning forehead, her throbbing temples, her agitated pulse, than she advised her to get into bed.—“I will make you some whey,” said she, “and warm your bed, for you have caught a cold chill.”

“Would

“ Would that it were the cold chill of death !”

“ Oh fie, Miss, fie, don’t say so ! I am sure you’ve no cause to wish for death ; ’tis wicked, Miss, indeed ’tis : and I *hard* our parson say so once.”

“ Ah, good Joanna ! it is wicked,” said Miriam ; “ but God will forgive me I trust, for I know not what I say,”

“ Oh dear ! Oh dear !” cried Joanna, with lifted hands, as she assisted our heroine to undress ; which having done, and administered to her a basin of whey, she left her, promising to look in on her again soon.

The disorder of Miriam increased rapidly. No longer could she revolve on her situation ; no longer could she feel its griefs ; her head grew light, her reason wandered, and at length wholly forsook its seat.

“ Oh,

"Oh good God!" cried Joanna. "Poor young creature, what shall I do for you?"

"Listen to the roaring waves!" cried Miriam, rising up in her bed; "they roll over my head."

"Lord! my dear Miss Merry, what do you mean? Why, my dear young Lady, don't you know where you are?"

"Full well I know," cried Miriam, emphatically. "Oh that rock! look how it pierces my breast; feel how it gores my side! There too is the precipice—and now he falls, and now he's gone for ever!"

"Who, my dear Miss Merry? Pray be calm, and look at old Joanna, who would do any thing to make you happy."

"Happy!" said she, "Oh Mrs. Fitzpatrick! how can you talk of happiness?"

"I

"I will send Mrs. Fitzpatrick to you," cried Joanna.

"Oh no! she will throw me down the precipice, and I shall never, never rise again! Mrs. Stafford too, she won't speak to me. Well, never mind, the rock is hard; 'tis a great deal harder than my heart, and it will soon pierce it through."

"Lord! Lord! how *malancholy*," said Joanna. "I do believe as 'tis a *franz*y *faver*;" and leaving the room, she went into the servants' hall, to report her opinion to them, and to beg that one of them would go into the parlour, and acquaint the family. But the servants were enjoying their dinner, and did not listen to the simple-hearted Joanna, who, after waiting till her patience was exhausted, turned out of the hall in a hurry, and in her white round-eared lawn

lawn cap, and blue linsley-woolsey gown, with checkered apron, she ran into the dining-room, where, awed by the presence of the company, she for a moment stood confused and silent.

“For God’s sake who are you?” said Mrs. Fitzpatrick, who had never seen her but once before; “and what is your business?”

“What d’ye want, Joanna?” said Fitzpatrick.

“Oh your Honour! Oh your Honour’s Lady! here’s a sad to do, or I should not have made so bold. I went into the servants’ hall, but I believe there’s a parcel of savages there, for they wouldn’t hearken to me.”

“What is it?” cried Mrs. Fitzpatrick, hastily, as if teased by her story.

“I

“ I ask pardon, your Honour’s Lady, for my boldness in appearing before you; but indeed ’twould melt a heart of stone—poor dear young soul, poor innocent young creature, poor, poor Miss Merry !”

Henry Stafford rose from his seat, and advanced towards her.

“ What is it ?” cried Fitzpatrick, peevishly.

“ Oh your Honour, poor Miss Merry is taken with a *franzys faver* !”

“ Who ?” cried Henry Stafford.

“ Lord help you, don’t listen to her nonsense !” said Mrs. Fitzpatrick. “ The girl’s head has been turned long enough, and now she has set this old woman raving.”

“ Good Heavens ! sister, how can you talk so unfeelingly ?”

“ Oh

“ Oh my gallant brother, my sex’s champion, because I see into this artifice ; I am aware of the shallow deception. Fitzpatrick and myself had a little conversation with the young lady this morning, and she was rather averse as to receiving a little advice from us relative to her future conduct, so this farce is exhibited.”

“ Oh my Lady ! your Honour’s Lady !” cried Joanna, “ she is a very *pittice objet* indeed, and a doctor must come to her”

“ Well, well, then let her have a doctor,” said Mrs. Fitzpatrick, “ and there’s an end of the matter.”

Joanna made her humble curtsies, and trotted away to tell one of the men to go for a doctor immediately ; but recollecting that they might not make the haste which was requisite, she hurried to the stable-yard

to

to desire Joseph to go. Joanna's reasoning was as sound at this instant as that of the most subtle casuist.—“ He loves her,” cried she ; “ my old Joseph loves her, and there is no fear of his speed.”

Joseph waited not to enquire of the groom which horse he should take, but hurried off to Y—— on a full gallop.

Poor Miriam continued raving for some hours, when a cold shiver seized her whole frame ; her teeth chattered in her head. She heaved a deep sigh, and saying—“ Oh 'tis very, very cold !” remained in a torpid and benumbed state till the apothecary arrived.

Mr. Williams, after feeling the pulse of his fair patient, thought it necessary to bleed her ; and ordering her some draughts, and giving a strict charge for her to be kept quiet,

quiet, he left the room. In the gallery, pacing it with anxious steps, he met a gentleman, who in an eager voice said—"Pray, Sir, how do you find Miss St. Ledger?"

"She is very much indisposed, Sir," answered Mr. Williams. "Her mind appears to me to have suffered acutely, and to have affected her whole frame. At present she is more composed. I have taken some blood, and I trust shall considerably lower her fever before morning."

Mr. Williams bowed, and was taking his leave, when the gentleman pulled him by the button, saying, while he put a guinea into his hand, with a faltering and unsteady voice—"Pray do you—is there—do you suspect any—any danger of her life?"

"No,

“ No, I hope not, I trust not ; but, my dear Sir, we can answer for nothing—the turns of a disorder like this——”

“ Oh ! take care what you say. Don’t distract me with a doubt.”

“ We have youth on our side, Sir, and I believe the disorder has to cope with an unbroken constitution ; but indeed, Sir, there is no occasion for this : I will do my duty—I will use every exertion.”

“ Put it in your pocket, Sir,” returned the gentleman. “ One word, one single word more—would a physician be necessary ?”

“ Why, to that, Sir, I of course cannot object,” said the candid apothecary ; “ but I have studied this disorder, and hitherto have been pretty successful.”

“ My friend, I rely on you,” cried the gentleman, grasping his hand. “ My peace of mind—my all is at stake ; but be silent on this subject.”

Williams emphatically laid the head of his cane on his lips, and bowing, went down stairs.

Joanna, the watchful, the attentive, the assiduous Joanna, for three days and three nights never quitted the bedside of Miriam ; it was then she experienced the force of humble attachment. Mrs. Stafford, she who had professed herself the friend of Miriam, contented herself with making enquiries for her at the door of her apartment, as she feared to enter lest she should catch the fever.

Mrs. Fitzpatrick’s dread of it was so great, that she did not venture into the passage which led to it ; and to the care of
the

the untutored Joanna did Miriam owe that life which she knew not how to appreciate according to its value.

At the end of five days Mr. Williams pronounced his patient out of danger ; and the gentleman, who had constantly met him in the gallery, as he heartily shook hands with him, forced into them a substantial token of his esteem, although it was conveyed in a very unsubstantial piece of paper.

Weak and enfeebled as was the body of Miriam, yet was her mind again active and vigorous ; and as in her chamber she pondered over her situation, she resolved to encounter any persecution, to bear any ill rather than become the wife of Jason ; for that her guardian would give up his scheme she did not expect, neither that he would believe her illness had proceeded from the

K 2

agitation

agitation of her mind, which she herself firmly believed to have been the cause ; but conscious that at present she was not equal to exertion, she determined that till she felt herself in a perfect state of renovation, she would rather dissimulate, and in appearance acquiesce with her guardian, than by continued agitation retard her slowly amending health.

“ Has not Mr. Fitzpatrick been in my chamber during my confinement, Joanna ? ” asked Miriam.

“ Oh ! ” said Joanna, lifting her hands and eyes, “ not he. Afraid of the *faver* too, I suppose with the rest of ’em ; but come, Miss, keep a good heart, your Joanna wasn’t afraid.”

“ I know it, I know it, good and worthy woman ! ” said Miriam.

“ Ah, Miss, and there was another that
—— ”

“ What ? ”

“What?” said Miriam.

“Ah, Miss! my Lady and my Lady’s brother be no more alike than you and me, and that can’t be much of a likeness, can it, Miss?—Oh I believe ’twas twenty times a day that, as I was sitting here, Miss, I should hear a little tap, just so; and when I came to the door he would say (and he would look up in my face so earnest!) ‘Is she better?’ And then he would look so sad, and heave such sighs, if I said ‘No.’ Ah, Miss, he’s very good-natured and friendly!”

“Who?” said Miriam.

“Young Mr. Stafford, Miss. And do you know, Miss, that I do think he’s very much like the gentleman who slept here that night; and ’tis plain that ’tis so, for my old Joseph thinks so too.”

“He is like him certainly,” said Miriam, who felt many pleasant sensations about her heart at the undesigned communications of Joanna.—“Ah!” thought she, “I will not contemplate the dark side of thy character; no, Stafford, I will think only of that feeling of compassion which induced thee to enquire for the suffering, the almost forgotten Miriam!”

CHAP. XII.

"In these green days, reviving sickness lifts its languid head,
"Life flows afresh, and young-ey'd health exalts
"The whole creation round."

THOMSON.

STILL did Miriam confine herself to her chamber, and she hoped the longer that she secluded herself, the longer she should ward off the day of renewed persecution. The pleasant month of May was arrived; the trees had already put forth their buds; the birds carolled in the air, which was become

mellow and pleasant. The illness of Miriam had afforded her time for reflection ; and instead of repining at the divine dispensations, she felt her heart dilated with gratitude for her sudden restoration from the bed of sickness. Supposing the family were taking their usual morning rides, she ventured to breathe the genial air of spring in the garden. She had taken several turns on the grassy walks, when feeling herself fatigued, she walked towards an old and almost dilapidated summer-house, intending there to rest herself. She had scarcely seated herself on an old chair, which had been once painted green, when a folded bit of paper caught her eye. She took it up. She saw some words written on it, and, little imagining their import, she read as follows—

“ You

“ You accuse me of cruelty, Mr. Mortimer ; I admire your assurance. Did I ever give you reason to expect that I meant any thing besides mere *badinage* ? However, I will give you your due ; you have of late been pretty attentive. Fitzpatrick goes to Y—— to-morrow. My wife uncle is going to take his pretty idiot to see some quality charnel-house, or some great burial-place in the neighbourhood. May be I may find a leisure hour for hearing your suit.

“ Your’s as you behave yourself,

“ LOUISA FITZPATRICK.”

“ My God !” sighed Miriam, “ and does such depravity, such turpitude exist ? Oh, the more I see of society, of polished
K 5 society,

society, the more do I shudder at its wickedness !”

The door opened as she had whispered this reflection to herself, and Mortimer entered. He started at beholding her ; his confusion was apparent, yet he advanced, and took her hand which still held the paper.—“ How I rejoice at again seeing Miss St. Ledger in a state of convalescence ! Oh tell me you are better, for your countenance still exhibits the traces of sickness.”

At that moment he cast his eyes on the paper ; it trembled in the hand of Miriam as she witnessed his guilty perturbation.—“ I rejoice also,” said she, in an agitated tone of voice, “ that I have an opportunity of delivering this into the hands of Mr. Mortimer ; it might have fallen into others, from whence he might not so easily have
gained

gained it. I was perfectly unsuspecting of its nature, or else I would not have hurt my own feelings by such a refusal."

Mortimer took the paper, looked like a condemned criminal, and for some minutes was unable to speak.—"You are always like yourself, an angel in thought, word, and deed," cried he, with emphasis. "Never will I forget this charming conduct," and he took her hand, and pressed it with vehemence to his lips.

"Neither this language nor this behaviour," said Miriam, as she withdrew her hand, "can be pleasing to me, Mr. Mortimer. My situation is too well known, and on that you presume to treat me with this unbecoming freedom."

"No, on my honour, my sacred honour," exclaimed he, "I revere, I respect you: I

think you one of the most amiable of women."

"What is your honour, your sacred honour?" asked Miriam, with cool severity. "What is the honour of him, who, while receiving favours—who, while on terms of intimacy—who, while an inmate in the house of him whom he calls friend, is privately stabbing at his peace, is undermining his happiness, is plotting the everlasting ruin of his wife! Well may you look awed. Little did you expect to hear such serious truths, such awful language from me, Mr. Mortimer—as little do I expect that you will attend to it; but there is an openness about your manner, a candour in your general sentiments, which have always interested me for you: and I now feel irresistibly impelled to speak to you, to warn you of that destruction which

is

is impending, but which you may yet turn aside from. I dare despise the customs of the world, and, in defiance of my youth and my sex, I dare tell you how deeply you are plunging in guilt !”

Mortimer rose from the chair, and walking to the other side of the summer-house, he flung himself in the window seat, resting his head upon his hands.

“ The tendency of modern education, the laxity of its principles, the latitude which it gives to youth, have early contaminated your morals. You are hurried on in the vortex of dissipation and licentiousness, and you do not give yourself time to reflect. Did you stop, did you consider a moment, you would turn back with horror from each guilty pursuit; but no, you rush madly on, and your career is destructive to yourself, and
spreads

spreads its baneful tendency around a wide circle. Example, an example like your's, is followed, and many perhaps may owe their ruin to you, on whom you may never have bestowed a thought; but when you are seen universally caressed and courted, and at the same time known to be dissipated and licentious, will not young men, who have not half your virtues, dare to imitate and outdo you in vice, assured that they will still hold their places in fashionable society, because Mortimer does his?—But the day of retribution will come, though late, and the despairing, the horror-stricken Mortimer, he who in the gay heyday of youth was admired, courted, applauded, and followed, will then, in the hours of sickness, old age, pain, and misery, a solitary, an isolated being, be ever tormented by the pangs of a guilty conscience.”

“ Oh,

“ Oh, for God’s sake, let me hear no more ! Oh Miss St. Ledger, I know, I feel the truth of every word you utter ! ”

“ Would that I could believe you ! ” cried she, with energy. “ Would that I could be assured it would be beneficial to you ! ”

“ It must, it shall,” cried he ; “ but Oh lovely and beloved monitor ! let me, while gratefully I bow the knee for kindness, for counsel, which I here swear shall not be thrown away, let me ask if I can assist you in any way, in any form or shape, if I can lighten the ills which you yourself, all perfect as you are, have to bear in this house ! ”

“ No,” exclaimed Miriam, “ the inhumanity of Mrs. Fitzpatrick’s conduct towards me passes unheeded ; for I despise it, when, had I the slightest regard for her, it
would

would wound me—I owe her not the smallest obligation. My mind is free : I have never stooped to conciliate her favour, and I will never submit to her unjust controul. But of this enough ; I must return to the house, for this is the first time I have ventured out of doors. Farewel, Mr. Mortimer !”

“ May Heaven for ever bless you !” exclaimed he, fervently. “ I shall never forget you, never cease to wish for your happiness. Oh that you would let me try to contribute to it this night, this very night ! I would speak to my uncle ; I would brave ———”

“ Pray, Sir,” said Miriam, calmly, “ reflect on what you are saying—the impetuosity of the moment hurries you on ; but I cannot be detained longer, for I already feel weak and weary. My best wishes attend you !”

you!" and with as much haste as she could use, she walked to the house.

Miriam had sat ruminating on her conversation with Mortimer some time, when she received the following note—

" MISS ST. LEDGER,

" Mr. Fitzpatrick desires me to tell you, that hearing you are enough recovered to have spent the whole of this morning in the garden, he expects you in his study to-morrow morning at ten, as Mr. Jason is coming over at that hour from Y—— purposely to have an early day in the ensuing week fixed for your nuptials with him. Accept my congratulations on your recovery.

" LOUISA FITZPATRICK."

This

This note operated like a thunderbolt on the mind of our heroine.—“What,” cried she, “is there no respite allowed to a creature just raised from the bed of sickness? Is there no feeling, no pity left in the breast of my guardian, or his cruel, cruel wife! Distracted, hopeless, bewildered, without a friend to advise, or a being to consult, how can I escape from the evils which seem opening before me?—Escape!” repeated she, “Ah what a word! it opens to me a thousand difficulties! No, I must stay and wait coolly, to hear what, perhaps, will again irritate my feeble nerves, and drive me to madness!”

Miriam sat till Joanna brought her dinner, resting her head upon her hand without being able to forget the word *escape*, which she seemed to have prophetically uttered.—

Having

Having tasted her little morsel, she desired Joanna to leave her to get her own dinner, and she would try to take a little sleep; but throwing herself on her bed, her thoughts prevented repose. The most feasible plan of escaping from the Castle was revolved on; and she had almost determined on making an attempt, when Stafford, the Stafford who had so anxiously awaited the progress of her illness, started up before her mind's eye.—
“Why should I think of him? He is artful and designing; Mortimer, open and candid, is by far the worthiest character.”

Then recollecting the recent proof which she had had of Mrs. Fitzpatrick's depravity, she clasped her hands together, saying—
“I will go—I will leave this detested house of intrigue; and the same Providence will watch me, will shelter me in a wide world, that has hitherto never forsaken me!”

To

To make a confidante of Joanna was the first step she meant to set about ; and her sanguine mind, eagerly bent on the execution of her project, could not rest till she again saw her humble friend.—The day was fast closing in, and Miriam could scarcely see across her little chamber ; yet Joanna came not, for hoping her young Lady was really asleep, that good creature feared disturbing her. Restless and uneasy, Miriam could bear her own thoughts and her impatience no longer ; but groping her way down stairs to the great hall, was proceeding to the housekeeper's room, where she supposed she should find her. As she passed the dining-room door she saw a light again emitted from it. The gentlemen she knew were in the parlour ; and recollecting that she might there gain a light, recollecting too that

that that was the place where she had last seen Henry Stafford, she resolved to enter. The door was half closed; her heart beat, her limbs trembled violently—she stopped, but conquering her emotions, proceeded and entered. Her step was soft; it was unheard. She quickly retired, but the scene she had witnessed had almost bereft her of motion. She tottered to the bottom of the staircase, and grasped a balustrade; but soon her feeble strength gave way, and she sunk on the stairs in a fainting fit, where she remained till discovered by one of the servants, who informing Joanna, she was presently conveyed to her chamber, amidst the lack-a-days and exclamations of her nurse.

The wish of getting away from the Castle was now considerably augmented, and Miriam resolved on attempting to bring over Joanna

to

to her scheme; but as her recent illness would be urged against it, and in particular her late evident weakness, she began by attacking her feelings.—“ Joanna,” said she, “ my good Joanna,” taking her hand, and pressing it between her’s, “ I owe you my life !”

“ No, no,” said Joanna, sobbing; “ that is God’s gracious goodness.”

“ Well, but you were his gracious instrument. Hear what I have to say. Oh Joanna ! would you like to see me again bereft of my senses—to see ——”

“ No, Lord help me ! I hope ——”

“ Well, then I must tell you how you may prevent it.”

Miriam then communicated her conference with her guardian, on the morning which preceded her illness; mentioned the
note

note which she had that morning received from Mrs. Fitzpatrick, the horror she felt at again encountering, in her weak state, such a scene, and her determination to leave the Castle that very night. It was a long time before she could prevail on Joanna to assist, or that she could persuade her that she was strong enough for the undertaking; and when she at last complied, she was not convinced that she was doing right: it was her love, not her will, which consented.

CHAP. XIII.

“ The world was all before her, where to chuse

“ Her place of rest ; and Providence her guide.”

MILTON.

IT was near nine o'clock when Joanna quitted the room to see for Joseph, who she promised should be ready with a horse at the terrace-gate by ten o'clock, as Miriam would not unnecessarily endanger her health by travelling later than she could possibly avoid. It was her intention to be taken to B——, a market town, about fourteen miles off,

off, situate in the county of Devonshire ; from thence she had heard stage-coaches went almost every day to Exeter, and when arrived in that city, she should consider herself out of the reach of danger, and be able to reflect on some means of providing for her future maintenance.—“ I am going,” cried she, “ unknown and unfriended, voluntarily to cast myself on a wide world ; but thou, Oh God ! who seest, who knowest the rectitude of my intentions, who seest that I prefer earning my daily bread to receiving the bounty of those who would controul my every thought, and make me act in defiance of my conscience, thou, Oh heavenly Providence ! will assist me, for on thee I rely.”

As this ejaculation was put up from the heart of Miriam, the tears flowed fast down

her cheeks ; yet hastily wiping them off, she set about packing a small portmanteau of necessary apparel, which Joanna had said Joseph could carry before him. What satisfaction did she now feel from having in her possession the ten pound note of Mr. Fitzpatrick ! Without that she could not have attempted her elopement.—“ It is the last favour I shall ever receive from him,” thought she ; “ he little knows of how much comfort my acceptance of it is now productive.”

At ten o'clock Joanna came. She kissed the hands, she clasped the knees of her young charge ; she called down all the good angels to witness how unwillingly she let her go, till at last, fearful that Joseph might be discovered, she hastily caught up the portmanteau, threw a red whittle of her own over

the

the brown riding-habit of Miriam, and silently supported her unsteady steps through numerous narrow passages, and several small paved courtways, till they had gained a door which led into the garden ; and crossing the grassy walks, now wet with dew, they at length reached the terrace-gate. Joseph, on his steed, awaited their arrival. Miriam flung herself one moment into the arms of Joanna, then bent her knee to the earth, and lifting her hands to Heaven, silently implored a blessing on her journey, and, with the assistance of her humble friend, was soon mounted behind Joseph, and carried swiftly over the grassy turf.

My young readers may by this time be curious to know what our youthful traveller had seen in the dining-room at the Castle, which had so disturbed her, and which had rendered her so doubly anxious to quit the house.

She had seen Mrs. Stafford leaning on the arm of a chair, apparently in much agitation. Her sighs were loud and frequent. A cambric handkerchief was held over her face; one hand she was moving in a manner which said—"No, I cannot receive it." She had seen Henry Stafford standing before her, endeavouring to put in it a miniature picture. Miriam had not a doubt of its being his own. She saw indeed only that it was a miniature set in gold; but whose picture could Henry Stafford wish to force into the keeping of any one, except his own? His emotions were so great, that he heard not the light step of Miriam; his head was averted from the door, and the whole countenance of Mrs. Stafford was veiled.

Miriam waited not to observe or comment upon this scene; she turned quickly away,
and

and her subsequent indisposition has already been related.

It was long after twelve when our heroine reached B——. Joseph was obliged to return, late as it was, that his absence might not be marked, or the horse enquired for by the groom. Joanna had promised to watch his coming, and to let him in; and having seen Miriam safely lodged in the best inn in the place, received her grateful thanks for his assistance, refused her offer of reward, desired her to let his Joanna hear of her some time or other, and taking the folded whittle, he left Miriam to herself, and to her own reflections.

“ I am now really alone in the world,” cried she; “ and instead of giving way to foolish feelings of despondency, I must exert all my faculties to think and act for myself.”

Ring the bell, therefore, she enquired at what hour the Exeter coach proceeded in the morning, and whether it was full. To her great joy, she heard that there was a place vacant, and that the hour of its setting out was at five in the morning. Miriam immediately secured her place, and desired to be shewn to her bed-chamber, convinced that she ought, if possible, to gain some sleep, in order to recruit her tired frame, and to enable her to encounter the fatigue of the ensuing day. Her head was giddy, her limbs ached from the unpleasant movement of the horse, which she was unaccustomed to; but she soon fell asleep, and the porter's rap alone disturbed her tranquil repose. She was quickly arrayed, and soon seated with five other people in a coach, which could with comfort accommodate only four.

“ All

“ All the way to Exon, Miss ?” was the question of a fat, portly man who sat opposite to her. The gentle and mild affirmative of her answer drew on her the eyes of the four other passengers, but her thoughts were abstracted from the present company ; her black veil shaded her face, and she was totally unconscious of being an object of observation, till roused from her reverie by the following conversation.

But first we will describe the persons who were jumbled together in the stage. The fat, portly gentleman, dressed in a brown coat and scarlet waistcoat, was called Jones ; he was a shopkeeper in Exeter (or, as he himself termed it, a merchant.) Next to him sat a female, whose shewy dress and conceited air, whose various gestures and exclamations shewed that she was a person of no

little consequence, that is, in her own opinion. A gentleman, of about forty years of age, on whose countenance there were visible marks of feeling, and on whose face there were traces of the deep furrows of suffering, sat next our heroine. At his side, a beautiful girl of about fourteen years of age, and opposite to her, a young man, who, silent and reserved, yet seemed to think her youth and loveliness a fit object for contemplation. Mr. Jones was giving an account of his native city; his partiality perhaps exaggerated in the description, but he pronounced it the best, the prettiest, the healthiest, the cleanest, and the genteelest city in the world.

“ Here,” said the gentleman, in a low voice to his blooming companion, “ here, my Henrietta, you see the force, the prejudice of local attachment, which I have been attempting to make you sensible of.”

The

The sweet smile on the young lady's rosy lips said, "I understand you;" and Mr. Jones proceeded.—"Now Mrs.—Mrs.—a—Mrs.—what's your name?"

"*Miss* Davis, if you please, Sir," laying a stress on the word *Miss*.

"Thank you, *Miss*. Well, *Miss* Davis, you shall judge for yourself; you will see with your own eyes in the evening."

"I hope so indeed, Sir," quickly retorted *Miss* Davis, smiling; "but, dear me! I have passed through it several times, and never found out any thing particular: but pray, Sir, what men of learning have you here—what men of letters? Have you reading rooms, and clubs for *litterhairy* people?"

"Oh yes, Mem, we have plenty of them there circulating libraries."

"My good Sir, but they are composed of Novels I suppose?"

"No, Mem : I beg your pardon, Mem ; but we gets the news there too, London as well as Exeter. I read 'em myself most days in the week, for I've a turn for reading myself."

"And a very pretty turn it is," said the young man in a dry, sarcastic tone, again wrapping himself close in his great coat.—The young lady laughed.

Mr. Jones answered—"Yes indeed, Sir, I find it so."

"Have you read the *Puzzles of Litter-hater*?" said Miss Davis, drawing up her head majestically.

"No, Miss, can't say I have."

The young gentleman looked at Henrietta. She smiled, and turned towards her protector,
who,

who, looking at Miriam, smiled also; and this little mistake of Miss Davis's had made four of the party more sociable in a single moment, than otherwise they might have been in a week.

Miriam's natural disposition was cheerful. She had of late had too much cause to be penfive to have remembered what cheerfulness was; but now feeling herself many miles from the Castle, and pleased with the gentleman and his fair charge, who were particularly attentive, and pleasing in their manners towards her, the long estranged smile once more played over her pallid features, and its dimpled attendants sported round her mouth.

“ Indeed, Miss,” said Mr. Jones, “ I should like to get the book for my wife and daughter to read; for when they set about
L 6
their

their fiddle-faddles, and their gimcracks, card-paper *hornaments*, as they call 'em, and their *fillagers*, and the rest of their *sticking* works, they make a fine mess, and a deuced litter too, and there's nobody hates a litter more than I do."—The young lady could no longer resist her propensity to laugh.—“And I suppose, Miss, this book as you mentioned, a *litter hater*, has something to say about them there things.”

“It treats of most things and most subjects, Sir,” said Miss Davis; “but as to fancy-work, there's no greater admirer, nor a person of more taste in the fancy way than myself.”

“I should imagine so,” said the young man, with a very grave countenance, and much mock solemnity in his manner.

But

But I will not teaze my fair readers with the account of what passed in a stage-coach ; for if they have subscribed three months at their circulating libraries, they have at least looked into the inside of a stage-coach twenty times ; for I cannot suppose that one of my gentle friends has really, and *in propria persona* been in one of these vulgar vehicles herself.

Mr. Seymour and his Henrietta did every thing to amuse our heroine. The long hills of Devonshire seemed to her particularly tremendous and tiresome, and their horses not being capital, they dragged on very slowly.

As evening approached, the spirits, the courage of Miriam began to droop. The dread of what she might have to encounter, her friendless, her unprotected situation, all started up in terrible array before her.

She

She struggled a great while with these bitter feelings, till at length an hysterical sob forced its way, and she threw herself back against the carriage in an agony of tears.

“What is the matter with you, young lady?” said Mr. Seymour, gently taking her hand. “You are ill, you are fatigued; but we shall soon come to Exeter, and then you must pass the evening with me and my Henrietta; and we must endeavour to restore you to a more tranquil frame of mind.”

These words, words of kindness, so new to Miriam, increased her emotions, and the soft tears continued to course down her cheeks; but that she might not appear ungrateful to him who thus kindly addressed her, she bent her head respectfully, while the artless Henrietta, expressing her feelings
in

in the language of nature, leaned behind Mr. Seymour to press the arm of Miriam. The pressure was not unnoticed: Miriam returned it gratefully, and Mr. Seymour called her his dear Henrietta as he raised her hand to his lips.

The day had departed when they entered Exeter. Mr. Jones had not light sufficient to point out its beauties, and Miss Davis's own eyes could not discover its defects; but he was so pleased with the lady of taste, that he invited her to sup with Mrs. and Miss Jones at his house, which she assented to. The young gentleman took a polite leave of the party, and walked to the house of a friend; and Mr. Seymour led his two young *elevés* into the New London Inn.

Miriam's head was giddy, her whole frame disordered, and it was many minutes
ere

ere she could address Mr. Seymour. At length she began; but he stopped her, saying,

“Not yet, not yet, my dear young lady. I have ordered our light meal early; then you will, I hope, be a little recovered: but my Henrietta and I must keep good hours, for we mean to get to Bath to-morrow night.”

After supper Mr. Seymour took the hand of Miriam.—“You are unhappy,” said he, in a low voice. “Tell me, candidly tell me, what can I do for you? There is something in the turn of your countenance, in your manner, your voice, your air, which interests me unaccountably for you; tell me, without reserve, your present plans: for, if I guess rightly, you are, for the first time in your life, about to act for yourself in a deceitful world. Mine is the language of sincerity—doubt it not; put confidence in
5 me;

me ; fancy me your father—you shall find me your friend. You expected not this address from a stranger : I can hardly account to myself for the emotions which, as it were, have impelled me towards you since accident this morning placed you at my side."

Tears gushed from the eyes of Miriam at this address. She was about to throw herself at the feet of Mr. Seymour, but he caught her in his arms, while Henrietta ran to her, and kissed her cheek.—"Conquer these emotions, my dear young lady," cried he ; "they unman me. Henrietta, my love, sit down," and he drew out his handkerchief, and wiped his eyes ; then gently placing Miriam in a seat beside him, he said—
"Now, without reserve, tell me if I can assist you."

Miriam

Miriam essayed to speak, but many times the trembling accents died on her lips. At length she combated with her emotions, and said—"I am an orphan, a friendless, a solitary orphan. I never knew my parents; I never heard my real name: I was left in infancy to the care of one who has no feeling, no principle, who thought he had a right to exert over me the most unlimited controul, the most tyrannic sway.—I—I have struggled a great while; but at length, last evening, I left him for ever, determined to throw myself on a wide world, and to attempt gaining a livelihood by those acquirements I possess, rather than remain longer a dependant on one whom I cannot esteem."

"You are right," said Mr. Seymour;
"you have acted as I myself would have
done :

done : and now hear what I have to say ; but first tell me, what am I to call you ?”

“ Miriam St. Ledger ; but my name is assumed—that only of Miriam belongs to me ; that was given me at the baptismal font by my guardian.”

The countenance of Mr. Seymour grew pale. He whispered—“ ’Tis strange—a singular coincidence !” But recovering himself, he added, in a low tone of voice—“ My family consists only of myself and my Henrietta ; but my heart is capacious enough to contain another. You shall be a second in my affections ; you shall be the elder sister of Henrietta ; you shall instruct her ; and you both shall solace the lonely hours of him who is come, after a long estrangement, to visit his natal home, yet who has lost every thing which had once the power to

to render it a paradise. But of this no more. Think you, you shall be able to journey with us to Bath to-morrow? My state of health will not admit of much delay. The Bath waters are now thought necessary for my health. I have been eight months only returned to England. At first my physicians sent me to Cheltenham; but as soon as they had got me there, I was hurried to the salubrious air of Penzance in Cornwall. Still it would not do, and I am now to find in Bath a certain and speedy remedy for all my ailments.—Who knows, Henrietta—perhaps I have found it in my daughter Miriam; for so from henceforth shall she be called by me.”

“ And by me, my sister Miriam,” said the delighted Henrietta, springing from her seat to press the offered hand of Mr. Seymour to her lips.

“ I

"I will not, I cannot be longer restrained," cried Miriam, flinging herself on her knees. "Here let me bow in grateful adoration to that God who hears the orphan, who has raised me a friend in the hour of adversity; and," continued she, turning to Mr. Seymour, "let me add that I am ready to follow you, whom I will now call father, to Bath, or to the extremity of the world!"

The tumult of joy and of feeling had now exhausted our poor heroine, who sunk on the floor senseless, and apparently without life. Mr. Seymour had her gently removed to a chamber. Nothing would tempt him to pursue his journey the following day, He would not suffer Miriam to leave her room. Henrietta by turns chatted to, amused, and embraced her father and sister," as she called them, "and the succeeding morning,

morning, in a post-chaise, the equally pleased and pleasing trio travelled post for Bath. Often as the heart of Miriam dilated with gratitude towards her new father, did the deeply-felt happiness rise in torrents to her eyes; as often was the silent, though fervent, thanksgiving offered up from her pure soul to the throne of the Most High! They arrived at Bath without any accident, and the following day were comfortably settled in lodgings on the South Parade.

And now, having left my heroine under that protection which she has hitherto been a stranger to—under the protection of a man of feeling, benevolence, and philanthropy, we will, if my readers please, return to the Castle, and see what our young beaux say to the elopement of our young belle.

CHAP.

CHAP. XIV.

“ What is that vice which still prevails

“ When almost every passion fails ?

“ ’Tis slander, and with shame I own

“ The vice of human-kind alone.”

COTTON.

THE housemaid, who had found Miriam in a fainting fit on the stairs the evening of her elopement, went into her chamber just as the family were assembling at breakfast ; but on perceiving the room in the same state as she had put it on the preceding night, she

she went to Joanna, and with much perturbation in her voice, and hurry in her manner, informed her of what she had seen. Joanna lifted up her hands and eyes in silence, and as it appeared in astonishment also.

“What possessed me I don’t know,” said the housemaid; “but I had a strange dream last night; and I went the first thing into Miss’s room, for d’ye know, Joanna, I dreamt she had flung herself over the cliff.”

“Law! law!” said Joanna, “*doan’t* talk of it.”

Joanna had some cunning: she wished to revenge herself on her master and mistress for their usage of her dear young Lady; so setting up a most prodigious outcry, which reached to the breakfast-parlour, she said, on Mrs. Fitzpatrick’s appearing to enquire
the

the cause of the tumult, that "Miss Merry had never been in bed for the night, and that as how Susan had dreamt she had thrown herself over the cliff in her frantics, for as how that they had found her the night before lying on the stairs in a speechless quandary."

Fitzpatrick's face became deep orange as he spoke. Mrs. Stafford fell into an hysterical fit, and Mrs. Fitzpatrick was silent. The Honourable Mr. Stafford, however, had sufficient presence of mind to enquire into the cause of their alarm; and when informed that Susan's dream, and the speechless quandary were all on which they built their present affright, he returned to the parlour, to endeavour to compose his Lady, and to learn what Mr. Fitzpatrick thought of his ward's disappearance. Alderman

Caxon was quietly drinking his tea, and eating his toast and butter; but on being addressed by the Honourable Mr. Stafford, he rang the bell, and ordered his nephew, Mortimer, to be sent to him.—“He shall look about for the young chit,” cried Caxon, and he again proceeded on the toast and butter.

“Where is Henry?” said Mr. Stafford; “let him also be summoned. Quiet yourself pray, Mrs. Stafford; your alarm is certainly premature, for at present you build only on the conjectures and dreams of a silly girl. The young lady is probably taking a morning walk, and Henry shall be sent to discover which way she is gone.”

“Aye, so he shall, so he shall, Sir,” said Fitzpatrick, who eagerly caught at the first glimpse of hope which was held out to him.

“Mr

“ Mr. Henry Stafford’s room is vacant, Sir,” said a servant, who presently returned to the parlour, “ and one of the grooms saw him cross the park at break of day.”

Mr. Stafford’s countenance fell ; Mrs. Fitzpatrick’s wore an air of exultation ; Mrs. Stafford’s hysterics were more violent than before, and Fitzpatrick sat down quietly to breakfast.

“ So, Sir,” exclaimed the lady of the mansion, “ you see my upright brother has thought fit to take off the ward of his sister’s husband.”

Mrs. Stafford fell back in her chair.—

“ For God’s sake don’t hurry yourself in this manner, my dear Emily ! The girl I saw would never do any good ; and if my brother had not taken advantage of her partiality for him, some other would, for I think

think her forwardness was pretty conspicuous."

"And pray, Madam, how can you so clearly ascertain my nephew's culpability?" said Mr. Stafford, with stern solemnity.

"Do you think he could so easily forget the precepts which I have inculcated in him from his youth, the family he sprang from, the name he bears—do you think he could so soon forget all the maxims of honour which have hitherto guided his actions, and casting them away for ever, have thus in a moment disgraced himself and his relations?"

"Oh no, I dare say not," said Mrs. Fitzpatrick, with quickness. "Probably he has or will confer the name of Stafford on the young lady, and by this fortunate union save both her own honour and his."

Mrs.

Mrs. Stafford's hysterics continued loud and violent.

"Well may this idea call forth your agitation, Emily," said Mr. Stafford, turning to his wife. "But it is impossible; what, think you that a Stafford could thus ally himself to a beggar, a dependant of Mr. Fitzpatrick's, a creature brought up on charity? Infamous suggestion! If indeed she had really been a St. Ledger, then—but pray, niece, utter not your suspicions till they amount to proofs."

"They are to me proofs already, Sir," said Mrs. Fitzpatrick.

"Ah!" thought Mrs. Stafford, "and to me they are confirmations strong as proofs of holy writ."

"If Mortimer does not come soon, he will lose his breakfast," said Caxon. Again

he rang the bell. A servant appeared.—

“ Tell my nephew we have almost finished our breakfast.”

“ Mr. Mortimer is not at home, Sir.”

“ Not at home ! What, is he eloped too ? ”

“ He has not been seen this morning, Sir. His servant is gone with him. He mentioned last night, in the butler’s room, that his master had ordered him to be ready with his curricie and horses as soon as it was light this morning.”

“ God blefs me ! ” said Caxon, “ this is very extraordinary—very extraordinary indeed ! ”

“ Now, Madam, you will allow,” said Mr. Stafford, turning to Mrs. Fitzpatrick, “ that at least there is as great a chance of the young lady’s being drove off in a curricie with Mr. Mortimer, as there is of her
having

having taken a ramble on foot with my nephew."

Mrs. Fitzpatrick's cheek flushed into a deep scarlet; her eyes sought the carpet; her lip quivered. Mrs. Stafford seemed more composed; she wiped her eyes, and putting her handkerchief in her pocket, said—"It is very plain that Miss St. Ledger is gone off with Mr. Mortimer."

"How is it plain, Madam?" said Mrs. Fitzpatrick, raising her head, and darting a furious glance at Mrs. Stafford. "I think the matter is full as much involved in mystery as before. Some people are eager to exculpate their own favourites, and to impeach other people; but perhaps—but no matter—the girl is gone, and I think it is more natural to conclude that she is gone with a companion, than that she has thrown herself into the sea."

“ I am sure,” said Caxon, “ if she is gone with my nephew, he shall be the worse off ; not a shilling of my property shall go to maintain a beggar girl ; let me hear that he dares to make her his wife ! ”

“ Lord ! my dear Sir, don’t make yourself uneasy,” cried Mrs. Fitzpatrick ; “ your nephew has more spirit than to do any such thing.”

“ And pray, niece,” retorted Mr. Stafford, “ why should you suppose your brother more likely to commit an imprudence than Mr. Mortimer ? ”

“ Ah ! why should he ? ” asked Mrs. Stafford, hastily.

“ Because he is so romantic, so susceptible. Mrs. Stafford, you understand his disposition.”

Mrs.

Mrs. Stafford was silenced; and a servant then appearing to say that Miss St. Ledger's riding dress was missing, no further proof was wanting of her having taken her flight on *terra firma*, instead of plunging into the briny waves.

Fitzpatrick sat down, and piously lifting up his hands and eyes, said—"From this moment I wash my hands of her. I have done my duty. This is gratitude!"

Caxon talked of setting off for London in pursuit of Mortimer the next day. Mrs. Fitzpatrick was silent and reserved; her taciturnity was imputed to her anxiety for the fair runaway. Mrs. Stafford continued pale and dejected; her eyes every instant filled with tears, and she vainly endeavoured to conceal the gnawing uneasiness which rankled at her heart.

Mr. Stafford paced up and down the great hall in fullen majesty, ruminating on the strange disappearance of his nephew. He felt for the dignity of the Staffords ; he felt for the honour of his nephew—that nephew who had been always dear to the heart of his uncle.

Mr. Jason punctually attended at the Castle according to appointment. He soon received his dismissal. The Nabob hinted that he should still depend on his interest in the Borough. Jason assented with a nod ; but he felt the loss of five hundred pounds, and a pretty wife, the ward of Squire Fitzpatrick ; and he ruminated on it all the way as he rode back to Y——.

Mr. Fitzpatrick that day postponed his visit to the Borough. Mr. Stafford forgot to visit the charnel-house ; but Mrs. Fitzpatrick

patrick forgot not the ungallant Mortimer, who had left the Castle on the very morning when she had promised to hear his suit.

In this frame of mind remained the party at the Castle the three first days after the departure of their three youthful guests. No steps had been taken to discover them, and had poor Miriam really been seduced or trepanned away, she would have been lost forever; for her kind guardian and benefactor was perfectly reconciled to her loss, and bore it with becoming *fortitude*!

We will now draw a veil over the Castle party, and return to our heroine, our happy heroine. Every succeeding day did the kindness, the attention of Mr. Seymour increase; already did Miriam love him as if he were her father, already did the youthful Henrietta wait for the approving look.

of her elder sister ere she would venture to yield her assent, or to give her opinion on the most trifling subject. Mr. Seymour was delighted with his new *protégée*; her accomplishments pleased him—her figure, her person, he looked at with pleasure; but her sensibility, her natural grace, the charming sincerity of her manner, the expressive turns of her animated countenance, all these enchanted, and at times almost overpowered him. Often, while sitting beside her, and listening to her voice accompanying Henrietta on the piano-forte, the plaintive note, the mellifluous fall would cause the unbidden tear to start to his eye, would force the struggling sigh from his labouring bosom. Often he watched her as she bent over Henrietta, directing and instructing her in works of genius, in drawing and painting, when

when he heard the justness of her remarks, when he saw the elegance of her taste, he looked at her for minutes together in speechless admiration ! All restraint was banished from the little party. The benevolent disposition of Mr. Seymour, never so happy as when contributing to the enjoyment of others, would make his girls (as he called them) partake of the amusements of the gay city to which he had brought them. His health permitted him to be their attendant, and the two Miss Seymours (for he requested Miriam to assume that name on his becoming her protector) were soon remarked for their beauty, their elegance, and their *naiveté* of manner ; every one was eager in asking the question—" Who are they ?" The general answer was—" The two daughters of a rich East India Nabob."

Mr.

Mr. Seymour's servants indeed (who had preceded him to Bath) knew that Miriam could not be his daughter : but they doted on their master ; they delighted to pay respect to those whom he distinguished, and they soon saw sufficiently into the character of our heroine to love her for her own sake. Henrietta they knew was only the happy child of their master's adoption, and they rejoiced that he had found another object so well deserving his kind care.

Soon after her arrival in Bath, Miriam had recited the little history of her short life to Mr. Seymour ; she eased her heart of a weight as she made the recital.—“ It is what I ought to do,” thought she ; “ and though I may feel humbled when I tell him how helpless a being he has taken under his care, yet I have not a single action of my
life”

life to mention which will call up a blush in my cheek. Ah! poor Miriam, you forgot this when, your whole face died with the deepest crimson, you mentioned your saving the life of Henry Stafford!"

Mr. Seymour noticed not her confusion. He praised her heroism, her resolution; his whole soul was engrossed, and he listened to her story with that attention so grateful to a reciter—attention which forcibly proclaimed the deep interest he took in what concerned the relater.

Acquainted with the circumstances of her past life, Mr. Seymour's before high opinion of Miriam increased rapidly; and he hesitated not to pronounce her a wonderful young woman, and to propose her conduct as a model for the youthful Henrietta.

Henrietta

Henrietta was enthusiastically fond of her new companion; and the conversation and instruction of Miriam were of real use to her. The judgment of Miriam had been matured beyond her years, and she corrected that overflowing vivacity, that enthusiastic impulse, which had yet known no controul in the ardent bosom of Henrietta.

It would be paying no compliment to the discernment of my readers, were I now to tell them that Henry Stafford had made a strong impression on the heart of Miriam; even now that she believed him unworthy, even now that she had witnessed his impropriety of behaviour, his image was cherished—his manners, his words, his actions, were often the subject of her contemplations; so averse was she to think ill of him, such a repugnance had she to attach guilt to him,
that

that she purposely passed over his inexplicable conduct when she had made her communications to her benefactor : yet for this reserve she condemned herself.—“ It proceeds from a blamable weakness,” cried she, “ from a culpable partiality, which I ought not to cherish, which I should root out for ever from my mind ;—but for thee, Oh Henry ! but for thee, I should now be the happiest of the happy !”

Yet do not imagine, my fair readers, that our Miriam brooded on Stafford’s image, and forgot the blessings of her present situation : no, she felt, she enjoyed them ; and when her thoughts would sometimes recur to him for whom she had been so deeply interested, she would endeavour to dissipate them by reflecting on the kindness, the affection of Mr. Seymour, and the love of her little Henrietta.

Mr.

Mr. Seymour had but just attained his fortieth year ; yet a long residence in India, and much severe suffering, had given him the appearance of a much older man. He had early in life lost a beloved wife—beloved indeed ; for eighteen years had passed since her death, yet could he not now converse of her with composure ! Miriam longed to know, yet dreaded to enquire into the history of his sorrows. He was silent on the subject, and she held his silence sacred. On every other topic he was open and communicative. Early acquainted with the world, his conversation was intelligent and interesting. His sentiments were the pure transcripts of his soul, where a high sense of honour was chastened by the softest benevolence, and the most undeviating sincerity, rectitude of principle, and singleness of heart.

“ What

“What a pity that such a heart is not happy!” was the first, the last ejaculation of the grateful Miriam on every succeeding day and every revolving night; for every succeeding day and revolving night gave her still added proofs of the urbanity of Mr. Seymour.

A month had glided swiftly away, when one morning Mr. Seymour walked to the pump-room between his two companions. He was taking a glass of water, when Miriam started, and cried out, while a flush of pleasing surprise mantled her face—“Oh my dear Sir, there is Mrs. Letter! But she is so dreadfully altered, that I scarcely knew her!”

She was springing away, but Mr. Seymour held her, while the glass fell from his hand. She looked in his face—it was pale as the
whitened

whitened wall; she took his hand—it was cold as marble. Mrs. Lester was forgotten, while, agitated and trembling, Mr. Seymour said he must return to his lodgings.

“ My dear Miriam,” said he, after he had been seated at home some time, “ tell me, do you know the maiden name of that lady, whose unexpected appearance gave you such evident pleasure, and me such—do you know her maiden name ?”

“ St. Ledger, Sir,” replied Miriam, alarmed she knew not why.

“ ’Tis as I suspected,” said Mr. Seymour, with a deep sigh. “ She was the sister of my wife. Nearly nineteen years are passed, yet, yet, my child, her face was not forgotten, altered, changed as it is since last I saw it. She would not remember Seymour, but ———” Then pausing, he desired Miriam

to

to tell him all she knew of Mrs. Lester. He was eagerly obeyed; for Miriam delighted to make the panegyric of those she esteemed.

When she had ended, Mr. Seymour said, "Ah, Miriam! teach me to acquire fortitude, teach me to meet Mrs. Lester with composure. I must see her; it is my duty, and it would be my delight could I discard painful recollections, could I forget the days when I first knew her, when she and her lovely sister—Ah! Miriam, Henrietta, may you ever remain strangers to those pangs which I now feel! Leave me at present; I will endeavour to regain my self-possession, and I will then try to recount to you, my children, the events which have thus afflicted me."

In

In the evening Mr. Seymour related his story, which will be found (little departing from his own words) in the following volume.

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